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# Thoughts from Maeterlinck



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# Thoughts From Maeterlinck

Chosen and Arranged  
by

E. S. S.



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**I**  
**THE INNER LIFE**



# Thoughts from Maeterlinck

## I

### THE INNER LIFE

**I**T is only by the communications we have with the infinite that we are to be distinguished from each other.—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

2. Our veritable birth dates from the day when, for the first time, we feel at the deepest of us that there is something grave and unexpected in life.—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

3. In the course of every friendship of some duration, there comes to us a mysterious moment when we seem to perceive the exact relationship of our friend to the unknown that surrounds him, when we dis-

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cover the attitude destiny has assumed towards him. And it is from this moment that he truly belongs to us.—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

4. The greatness of our life depends on so little! In the midst of the hundred incidents of ordinary days, the verse of a poet may suddenly reveal something stupendous to us. No solemn word has been pronounced, and we feel that nothing has been called forth; and yet, why has an ineffable face beckoned to us from behind an old man's tears; why does a vast night, starred with angels, extend over the smile of a child; and why, around a yes or a no, murmured by a soul that sings and busies itself with other matters, do we suddenly hold our breath for an instant and say to ourselves, 'Here is the house of God, and this one of the approaches to Heaven'?—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

5. You seek God in your life, and you

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say God appears not. But in what life are there not thousands of hours akin to the hour in that drama where all are waiting for the divine intervention, and none perceive it, till an invisible thought that has flitted across the consciousness of a dying man suddenly reveals itself, and an old man cries out, sobbing for joy and terror, 'But God, there is God!'—*The Treasure of the Humble*.

6. To every man there come noble thoughts that pass across his heart like great white birds.—*The Treasure of the Humble*.

7. Never do we belong more completely to ourselves than on the morrow of an irreparable catastrophe. It seems, then, as though we had found ourselves again, as though we had won back a part of ourselves that was necessary and unknown.—*The Treasure of the Humble*.

8. Which of us, when by the side of the

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most ordinary person perhaps, but has suddenly become conscious of the advent of something that none had summoned? Was it the soul, or perhaps life, that had turned within itself like a sleeper on the point of awakening? I know not; nor did you know, and no one spoke of it; but we did not separate from each other as though nothing had happened.—*The Treasure of the Humble*.

9. What would result were our soul suddenly to take visible shape, and be compelled to advance into the midst of her assembled sisters, stripped of all her veils, but laden with her most secret thoughts, and dragging behind her the most mysterious, inexplicable acts of her life? Of what would she be ashamed? Which are the things she fain would hide? Would she, like a bashful maiden, cloak beneath her long hair numberless sins of the flesh? She knows not of them, and those sins have

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never come near her. They were committed a thousand miles from her throne; and the soul even of the prostitute would pass unsuspectingly through the crowd, with the transparent smile of the child in her eyes. She has not interfered; she was living her life where the light fell on her, and it is this life only that she can recall.—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

10. How strangely do we diminish a thing as soon as we try to express it in words! We are conscious of having dived to the most unfathomable depths; and yet, when we reappear on the surface, the drop of water that glistens on our trembling fingertips no longer resembles the sea from which it came. We believe we have discovered a grotto that is stored with bewildering treasure; we come back to the light of day, and the gems we have brought are false—mere pieces of glass—and yet does



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the treasure shine on, unceasingly, in the darkness!—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

11. Something there is that we hide from most men, and we ourselves are ignorant of what this thing may be. Strange secrets of life and death pass between two creatures who meet for the first time; and many other secrets besides, nameless to this day, that yet at once thrust their impress upon our being, our features, the look of our eyes; and even while we press the hand of our friend, our soul will have soared perhaps beyond the confines of this life.—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

12. It is felt on all sides that the conditions of ordinary life are changing, and the youngest of us already differ entirely in speech and action from the men of the last generation. A mass of useless conventions, habits, pretences, and makeshifts, is being swept into the gulf; and though we know it not, it is by the invisible alone that

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most of us judge one another.—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

13. Give the peasant the power of expressing what hides in his soul, and he would pour forth ideas that were not yet in the soul of Racine. And thus it is that men of a genius much inferior to that of Shakespeare or Racine have yet had revealed to them glimpses of a secretly luminous life, whereof the outer crust only had been espied by those masters. For, however great the soul, it avails not that it should wander in isolation through space or time. Unaided it can do but little. It is the flower of the multitude.—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

14. Is it fully borne home to you that if you have perchance this morning done anything that shall have brought sadness to a single human being, the peasant, with whom you are about to talk of the rain or the storm, will know of it—his soul will

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have been warned even before his hand has thrown open the door? Though you assume the face of a saint, a hero or martyr, the eye of the passing child will not greet you with the same unapproachable smile if there lurk within you an evil thought, an injustice, or a brother's tears. A hundred years ago the soul of that child would perhaps have passed, unheeding, by the side of yours. . . . —*The Treasure of the Humble.*

15. A time will come perhaps—and many things there are that herald its approach—a time will come perhaps when our souls will know of each other without the intermediary of the senses. It is certain not a day passes but the soul has added to its ever-widening domain. It is very much nearer to our visible self, and takes a far greater part in all our actions, than was the case two or three centuries ago. A spiritual epoch is perhaps upon us; an epoch

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to which a certain number of analogies are found in history. For there are periods recorded when the soul, in obedience to unknown laws, seemed to rise to the very surface of humanity, whence it gave clearest evidence of its existence and of its power. And this existence and this power revealed themselves in countless ways, diverse and unforeseen. It would seem, at moments such as these, as though humanity were on the point of struggling from beneath the crushing burden of matter that weighs it down. A spiritual influence is abroad that soothes and comforts; and the sternest, direst laws of Nature yield here and there. Men are nearer to themselves, nearer to their brothers; in the look of their eyes, in the love of their hearts, there is deeper earnestness and tenderer fellowship. Their understanding of women, children, animals, plants—nay, of all things—becomes more pitiful and more profound. The statues,

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paintings, and writings that these men have left us may perhaps not be perfect, but, none the less a secret power dwell therein, an indescribable grace, held captive and imperishable for ever. A mysterious brotherhood and love must have shone forth from the eyes of these men; and signs of a life that we cannot explain are everywhere vibrating by the side of the life of every day.—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

16. Where shall we look for the grandeur and beauty that can no longer be found in visible action, or in the words that have lost their attractive images?—For words are no more than a kind of mirror which reflects the beauty of all that surrounds it, and the beauty of this new world in which we have being does not seem as yet to have touched with its rays these somewhat reluctant mirrors. Where shall we seek this horizon and poetry?—for these seem hard to find in a mystery which still exists, it is

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true, but evaporates the moment we try to give it a name.—*Preface to the Modern Drama.*

17. Look upon men and things with the inner eye, with its form and desire, never forgetting that the shadow they throw as they pass upon hillock or wall, is but the fleeting image of a mightier shadow, which, like the wing of an imperishable swan, floats over every soul that draws nearer to their soul.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

18. The smallest consoling idea has a strength of its own that is not to be found in the most magnificent plaint, or the most grandiose expression of sorrow.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

19. Our slightest gesture at nightfall seems more momentous by far than all we have done in the day; but man was created to work in the light, and not to burrow in darkness.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

20. It is needful, but not all-sufficient,

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to have reflected deeply and boldly on man, and nature, and God; for the profoundest thought is of little avail if it contain no germ of comfort.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

21. A sorrow your soul has changed into sweetness, into indulgence of patient smiles, is a sorrow that shall never return without spiritual ornament; and a fault or defect you have looked in the face can harm you no more, or even be harmful to others.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

22. The humble thought that connects a mere satisfied glance, an ordinary, everyday act of simple kindness, or an insignificant moment of happiness, with something eternal, and stable, and beautiful, is of far greater value, and infinitely nearer to the mystery of life, than the grand and gloomy meditation wherein sorrow, love, and despair blend with death and destiny and the apathetic forces of nature.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

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23. Were nature to become less indifferent, it would no longer appear so vast. Our unfettered sense of the infinite cannot afford to dispense with one particle of the infinite, with one particle of its indifference; and there will ever remain something within our soul that would rather weep at times in a world that knows no limit, than enjoy perpetual happiness in a world that is confined.  
—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

24. So long as we know not what it opens, nothing can be more beautiful than a key. . . .—*Aglavaine and Selysette.*

25. For all that we say that the soul shows itself in our eyes, it seems to vanish as we gaze into them.—*Aglavaine and Selysette.*

26. Sometimes one knows a thing so long without knowing . . . and then, one day, we feel we have not been kind enough, that we might have done more, that we have not loved as we should have loved.



## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

And we yearn to begin again before it be too late.—*Aglavaine and Selysette*.

27. We should try to regard disillusion as mysterious, faithful friends, as counselors none can corrupt.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

28. The fragrance and limpid silence of the dawn makes one feel as though one were alone in the world, and there is something of the dawn in every word one says.—*Aglavaine and Selysette*.

29. Perhaps it is not well to awaken those who slumber, above all when their sleep is innocent and sweet. . . .—*Aglavaine and Selysette*.

30. We do not blame the poor because their home is not a palace; it is sad enough to be compelled to live in a hovel.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

31. The dreams of the weak will be often more numerous, lovelier, than those of the strong; for these dreams absorb all

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their energy, all their activity.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

32. Some doubts are as generous and passionate as the very noblest convictions.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

33. Every ideal that conforms not with some strenuous inward reality is nothing but falsehood—sterile and futile, obsequious falsehood. Two or three ideals, that lie out of our reach, will suffice to paralyse life.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

34. The soul that is misunderstood is most often the one that has made the least effort to gain some knowledge of self.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

35. To look largely on the sadness of one's life is to make essay, in the darkness, of the wings that shall one day enable us to soar high above this sadness.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

36. On your way to the grave a thousand external events may approach you, whereof

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not one, it may be, shall find within you the force that it needs to turn to moral event.—

*Wisdom and Destiny.*

37. 'To act,' says Barrès, 'is to annex to our thoughts vaster fields of experience.'

It is also, perhaps, to think more quickly than thought, and more completely; for we no longer think with the brain alone, but with every atom of life.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

38. To disdain is to declare oneself a stranger; and what can you hope to do in a world where you shall ever pass as a stranger? To-day has this advantage over yesterday, that it exists and was made for us. Be to-day what it will, it has wider knowledge than yesterday; and that alone is sufficient to render it more beautiful, and vaster.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

39. It is when our love is becoming too great that we are afraid of the gentle. . . .  
—*Aglavaine and Selysette.*

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40. It avails us nothing unduly to bemoan our errors or losses. For happen what may to the man of simple faith, still, at the last minute of the sorrow-laden hour, at the end of the week or year, still will he find some cause for gladness as he turns his eyes within. Little by little he has learned to regret without tears.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

41. To-day misery is the disease of mankind, as disease is the misery of man. And even as there are physicians for disease, so should there be physicians for human misery. But can the fact that disease is, unhappily, only too prevalent, render it wrong for us ever to speak of health?—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

42. The angels that dry our eyes bear the form and features of all we have said and thought—above all, of what we have done, prior to the hour of misfortune.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

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43. Economy avails us nothing in the region of the heart, for it is there that men gather the harvest of life's very substance; and better that nothing were done there than that things should be done by halves; and that which we have not dared to risk is most surely lost of all. To limit our passions is only to limit ourselves; and we are the losers by just so much as we had hoped to gain.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

44. The earnest wayfarer along the paths of life becomes ever more deeply concerned, as his travels widen, of the beauty, the wisdom, and truth of the simplest and humblest laws of existence.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

45. There is not a thing in this world whereupon your glance or your thought can rest but contains within it more treasure than either of these can fathom; nor is there a thing so small but it has a vastness within it that all the light of the soul can

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at best but faintly illumine.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

46. We know exactly how much the inert forces owe to the thinker; we forget the deep indebtedness of the thinker to inert forces.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

47. Thinkers too often are apt to despise those who go through life without thinking. Thought is doubtless of high value; our first endeavour should be to think as often and as well as we can; but nevertheless do we err in believing that the possession, or lack, of a certain faculty for handling general ideas can actually separate men. After all, the difference between the greatest thinker and the smallest provincial burgher is often only the difference between a truth that at times finds expression, and another that never is able to crystallize into form.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

48. Thought is a solitary, wandering,

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fugitive force, which advances towards us to-day and to-morrow perhaps will vanish; whereas every deed presupposes a permanent army of ideas and desires which have, after lengthy effort, secured foothold in reality.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

49. Let us always remember that nothing befalls us that is not of the nature of ourselves. There comes no adventure but wears to our soul the shape of our everyday thoughts; and deeds of heroism are only offered to those who have, for many long years, been heroes in obscurity and silence. And whether you climb up the mountain or go down the hill to the valley, whether you journey to the end of the world or merely walk round your house, none but yourself shall you meet on the highway of fate. If Judas go forth to-night, it is towards Judas his steps will tend, nor will chance for betrayal be lacking; but let Socrates open his door, he shall find Socrates

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asleep on the threshold before him, and there will be occasion for wisdom.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

50. To man, though all that he value go under, the intimate truth of the universe must be wholly, pre-eminently admirable.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

51. Till reality confront us, it is well, it may be, to cherish ideals that we hold to surpass it in beauty; but when reality stands face to face, then must the ideal flame that has fed on our noblest desires be content to throw faithful light on the less fragile, less tender beauty of the mighty mass that crushes these desires.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

52. In life, books have by no means the importance that writers and readers claim for them. We should regard them as did a friend of mine, a man of great wisdom, who listened one day to the recital of the last moments of the Emperor Antoninus



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Pius. Antoninus Pius—who was perhaps truly the best and most perfect man this world has known, better even than Marcus Aurelius; for in addition to the virtues, the kindness, the deep feeling and wisdom of his adopted son, he had something of greater virility and energy, of simpler happiness, something more real, spontaneous, closer to everyday life—Antoninus Pius lay on his bed, awaiting the summons of death, his eyes dim with unbidden tears, his limbs moist with the pale sweat of agony. At that moment entered the captain of the guard, come to demand the watchword, such being the custom. *Aequanimitas—evenness of mind*, he replied, as he turned his head to the eternal shadow. “It is well that we should love and admire that word,” said my friend.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

53. To be conscious of moral improve-

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ment is of the essence of consciousness.—

*Wisdom and Destiny.*

54. The event in itself is pure water that flows from the pitcher of fate, and seldom has it either savour or perfume or colour. But even as the soul may be wherein it seeks shelter, so will the event become joyous or sad, become tender or hateful, dead-ly or quick with life.—*Wisdom and Des-tiny.*

55. To those round about us there hap-pen incessant and countless adventures, whereof every one, it would seem, contains a germ of heroism; but the adventure passes away, and heroic deed is there none. But when Jesus Christ met the Samaritan, met a few children, an adulterous woman, then did humanity rise three times in suc-cession to the level of God.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

56. No great inner event befalls those who summon it not; and yet is there germ

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of great inner event in the smallest occurrence of life.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

57. If there be in my life no noble or generous deeds that memory can bring back to me, then, at the inevitable moment when memory melts into tears, must these tears, too, be bereft of all that is generous or noble. For tears in themselves have no colour, in order that they may the better reflect the past life of our soul; and this reflection becomes our chastisement, or our reward.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

58. The inner life that is surest, most lasting, possessed of the uttermost beauty, must needs be the one that consciousness slowly erects in itself, with the aid of all that is purest in the soul.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

59. Would Carlyle have desired to exchange the magnificent sorrow that flooded his soul, and blossomed so tenderly there, for the conjugal joys, superficial and sun-

## The Inner Life

less, of his happiest neighbour in Chelsea? And was not Ernest Renan's grief, when Henriette, his sister, died, more grateful to the soul than the absence of grief, in the thousands of others, who have no love to give to a sister?—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

60. There are many ways of accepting misfortune—as many, indeed, as there are generous feelings or thoughts to be found on the earth; and every one of those thoughts, every one of those feelings, has a magic wand that transforms, on the threshold, the features and vestments of sorrow. Job would have said, 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord'; and Marcus Aurelius perhaps, 'If it be no longer allowed me to love those I loved high above all, it is doubtless that I may learn to love those whom I love not yet.'—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

61. Infinitely too great importance is

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generally ascribed to the triumph of spirit over body, those pretended triumphs being most often the total defeat of life.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

62. Should we not invariably act in this life as though the God whom our heart desires with its highest desire were watching our every action?—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

63. Be sure that the day you lingered to follow a ray of light through a crevice in the door of life, you did something as great as though you had bandaged the wounds of your enemy, for at that moment you no longer had an enemy.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

64. To believe is not enough; all depends on how we believe. I may believe that there is no God, that I am self-contained, that my brief sojourn here serves no purpose; that in the economy of this world without limit my existence counts for as little as the evanescent hue of a flower—

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I may believe all this, in a deeply religious spirit, with the infinite throbbing within me; you may believe in one all-powerful God, who cherishes and protects you, yet your belief may be mean, and petty, and small. I shall be happier than you, and calmer, if my doubt is greater, and nobler, and more earnest than is your faith; if it has probed more deeply into my soul, traversed wider horizons, if there are more things it has loved. And if the thoughts and feelings on which my doubt reposes have become vaster and purer than those that support your faith, then shall the God of my disbelief become mightier and of suppremer comfort than the God to whom you cling. For, indeed, belief and unbelief are mere empty words; not so the loyalty, the greatness and the profoundness of the reasons wherefore we believe or do not believe.

—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

65. A truth that disheartens, because it

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is true, is still of far more value than the most stimulating of falsehoods.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

66. A mystery rarely disappears—as a rule, it only shifts its ground. But it is often most important and most desirable that we should bring about this change of abode. It may be said that two or three such changes almost stand for the whole progress of human thought: the dislodgment of two or three mysteries from a place where they did harm, and their transference to a place where they become inoffensive and capable of doing good. Sometimes, even, there is no need for the mystery to change its place; we have only to identify it under another name. What was once called ‘the gods’ we now term ‘life.’ And if life be as inexplicable as were the gods, we are at least the gainers to the extent that no one has the right to speak or

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do wrong in its name.—*The Buried Temple.*

67. It is not the incomprehensible in nature that masters and crushes us, but the thought that nature may possibly be governed by a conscious, superior, reasoning will: one that, although super-human, has yet some kinship to the will of man. What we dread, in a word, is the presence of a God; and speak as we may of fatality, justice, or mystery, it is always God whom we fear: a being, that is, like ourselves, though almighty, eternal, invisible, and infinite.—*The Buried Temple.*

68. When we say to ourselves, 'This thing is of Nature's devising; it is she has ordained his marvel; these are her desires that we see before us,' the fact is merely that our special attention has been drawn to some tiny manifestation of life upon the boundless surface of matter that we deem inactive, and choose to describe, with evi-



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dent inaccuracy, as nothingless and death. A purely fortuitous chain of events has allowed this special manifestation to attract our attention; but a thousand others—no less interesting, perhaps, and informed with no less intelligence—have vanished, not meeting with a like good fortune, and have lost for ever the chance of exciting our wonder. It were rash to affirm aught beside; and all that remains—our reflections, our obstinate search for the final cause, our admiration and hopes—all these in truth are no more than our feeble cry as, in the depths of the unknown, we clash against what is more unknowable still; and this feeble cry declares the highest degree of individual existence attainable for us on this mute and impenetrable surface, just as the flight of the condor, the song of the night-ingle, declare the highest degree of existence their species allows.—*The Life of the Bee.*

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69. There comes a period of life when we have more joy in saying the thing that is true than in saying the thing that merely is wonderful.—*The Life of the Bee.*

70. The same light that falls on the intellect falls also on passion, whereof none can tell whether it be the smoke of the flame, or the wick.—*The Life of the Bee.*

71. There is a hopefulness in man which renders him unwilling to grant that the cause of his misfortune may be as transparent as that of the wave which dies away in the sand or is hurled on the cliff, or of the insect whose little wings gleam for an instant in the light of the sun till the passing bird absorbs its existence.—*The Buried Temple.*

72. The hour when a lofty conviction forsakes us should never be one of regret. If a belief we have clung to goes, or a spring snaps within us; if we at last dethrone the idea that so long has held sway,

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this is proof of vitality, progress, of our marching steadily onwards, and making good use of all that lies to our hand. We should rejoice at the knowledge that the thought which so long has sustained us is proved incapable now of even sustaining itself. And though we have nothing to put in the place of the spring that lies broken, there need still be no cause for sadness. Far better the place remain empty than that it be filled by a spring which the rust corrodes, or by a new truth in which we do not wholly believe. And besides, the place is not really empty. Determinate truth may have not yet arrived, but still, in its own deep recess, there hides a truth without a name, which waits and calls. And if it wait and call too long in the void, and nothing rise in the place of the vanished spring, it still shall be found in moral no less than in physical life, that necessity will be able to create the organ it needs, and that the

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negative truth will at last find sufficient force in itself to set the idle machinery going. And the lives that possess no more than one force of this kind are not the least strenuous, the least ardent, or the least useful.—*The Buried Temple.*

73. Of what is this consciousness composed whereof we are so proud? Of far more shadow than light, of far more acquired ignorance than knowledge, of far more things whose comprehension, we are well aware, must ever elude us, than of things that we actually know. And yet in this consciousness lies all our dignity, our most veritable greatness; it is probably the most surprising phenomenon this world contains. It is this which permits us to raise our head before the unknown principle, and say to it, 'What you are I know not, but there is something within me that already enfolds you. You will destroy me perhaps, but if your object be not to construct, from

## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

my ruins, an organism better than mine, you will prove yourself inferior to what I am, and the silence that will follow the death of the race to which I belong will declare to you that you have been judged. And if you are not capable even of caring whether you be justly judged or not, of what value can your secret be? It must be stupid, or hideous. Chance has enabled you to produce a creature that you yourself lacked the quality to produce. It is fortunate for him that a contrary chance should have permitted you to suppress him, before he had fathomed the depth of your unconsciousness; more fortunate still that he does not survive the infinite series of your awful experiments. He had nothing to do in a world where his intellect corresponded to no eternal intellect, where his desire for the better could attain no actual good.'—*The Life of the Bee*.

74. 'Within me there is more,' runs the

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fine device inscribed on the beams and pediments of an old patrician mission at Bruges, which every traveller visits; filling a corner of one of those tender and melancholy quays that are as forlorn and lifeless as though they existed only on canvas. And so too might man exclaim, 'Within me there is more;' every law of morality, every intelligible mystery.—*The Buried Temple.*

75. It is not unreasonable to believe that the paramount interest of life, all that is truly lofty and remarkable in the destiny of man, reposes almost entirely in the mystery that surrounds us; in the two mysteries, it may be, that are mightiest, most dreadful of all—fatality and death. And indeed there are many whom the fatigue induced in their minds by the natural uncertainties of science has almost compelled to accept this belief. I, too, believe, though in a somewhat different fashion, that the study

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of mystery in all its forms is the noblest to which the mind of man can devote itself; and truly it has ever been the study and care of those who, in science and art, in philosophy and literature, have refused to be satisfied merely to observe and portray the trivial, well-recognized truths, facts, and realities of life. And we find that the success of these men in their endeavour, the depth of their insight into all that they knew, has most strictly accorded with the respect in which they held all they did not know, with the dignity that their mind or imagination was able to confer on the sum of unknowable forces. Our consciousness of the unknown wherein we have being gives life a meaning and grandeur which must of necessity be absent if we persist in considering only the things that are known to us; if we too readily incline to believe that these must greatly transcend in im-

## The Inner Life

portance the things which we know not yet.

—*The Buried Temple*.

76. Whatever we take from the skies we find again in the heart of man.—*The Buried Temple*.

77. We derive no greatness, sublimity, or depth, from unceasingly fixing our thoughts on the infinite and the unknown. Such meditation becomes truly helpful only when it is the unexpected reward of the mind that has loyally, unreservedly, given itself to the study of the finite and the knowable; and to such a mind it will soon be revealed how strangely different is the mystery which precedes what one does not know from the mystery that follows closely on what one has learned. The first would seem to contain many sorrows, but that is only because the sorrows are grouped too closely, and have their home upon two or three peaks that stand too nearly together.



## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

In the second is far less sadness, for its area is vast; and when the horizon is wide, there exists no sorrow so great but it takes the form of a hope.—*The Buried Temple*.

## II HAPPINESS



## II

### HAPPINESS

**T**HERE are times when déep thought is no more than merely fictitious consciousness; but an act of charity, the heroic duty fulfilled—these are true consciousness; in other words, happiness in action.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

79. In happiness there are far more regions unknown than there are in misfortune. The voice of misfortune is ever the same; happiness becomes the more silent as it penetrates deeper.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

80. Would you learn where true happiness dwells, you have only to watch the movements of those who are wretched, and seek consolation.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

81. Happiness or unhappiness arises from all that we do from the day of our

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birth to the day of our death; and it is not in death, but indeed in the days and the years that precede it, that we can discover a man's true happiness or sorrow—in a word, his destiny.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

82. To know what happiness means is of far more importance to the soul of man than to enjoy it.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

83. He is the happiest man who best understands his happiness; for he is of all men most fully aware that it is only the lofty idea, the untiring, courageous, human idea, that separates gladness from sorrow.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

84. Some ideas there are that lie beyond the reach of any catastrophe. He will be far less exposed to disaster who cherishes ideas within him that soar high above the indifference, selfishness, vanities, of everyday life. And therefore, come happiness or sorrow, the happiest man will be he within

## Happiness

whom the greatest idea shall burn the most ardently.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

85. There are some who are wholly unable to support the burden of joy. There is a courage of happiness as well as a courage of sorrow. It may even be true that permanent happiness call for more strength in man than permanent sorrow.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

86. Is it not the first duty of those who are happy to tell of their gladness to others? All men can learn to be happy; and the teaching of it is easy.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

87. Do not believe you are happy till you have been led by your happiness up to the heights whence itself disappears from your gaze, but leaving you still with the same unimpaired desire to live.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

88. Before we can bring happiness to others, we must first be happy ourselves;

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nor will happiness abide within us unless we confer it on others.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

89. If the happiness of your brother sadden you, do not despise yourself; you will not have to travel far along the road before you come across something within yourself that will not be saddened.—*The Treasure of the Humble*.

90. It is well to know moments of material happiness, since they teach us where we shall look for loftier joys; and all that we gain, perhaps, from listening to the hours that babble aloud in their wantonness is that we are slowly learning the language of the hours whose voice is hushed.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

91. There is in happiness a humility deeper and nobler, purer and wider, than sorrow can ever procure.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

92. We should be as happy as possible,

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and our happiness should last as long as possible; for those who can finally issue from self by the portal of happiness, know infinitely wider freedom than those who pass through the gate of sadness.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

93. It is well, at first, to know happiness as men conceive it, so that, later, we may have good reason for preferring the happiness of our choice.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

94. It may be that a man will find happiness in the puny little victories that his vanity, envy, or indifference win for him day after day. Shall we begrudge him such happiness, we, whose eyes can see further? Shall we strive for his consciousness of life, for the religion that pleases his soul, for the conception of the universe that justifies his cares? Yet out of these things are the banks made between which happiness flows; and as they are, so shall the river be, in shallowness or in depth. He may



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believe that there is a God, or that there is no God; that all ends in this world, or that it is prolonged into the next; that all is matter or that all is spirit. He will believe these things much as wise men believe them; but do you think his manner of belief can be the same? To look fearlessly upon life; to accept the laws of nature, not with meek resignation, but as her sons, who dare to search and question; to have peace and confidence within our soul—these are the beliefs that make for happiness.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

95. Our happiness mainly depends on the freedom that reigns within us; a freedom that widens with every good deed, and contracts beneath acts of evil. Not metaphorically, but literally, does Marcus Aurelius free himself each time he discovers a new truth in indulgence, each time that he pardons, each time he reflects. Still less of a metaphor is it to declare that Macbeth

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enchains himself anew with every fresh crime. And if this be true of the great crimes of kings and the virtues of heroes, it is no less true of the humblest faults and most hidden virtues of ordinary life. Many a youthful Marcus Aurelius is still about us; many a Macbeth, who never stirs from his room.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

96. Happiness is a plant that thrives far more readily in moral than in intellectual life. Consciousness—the consciousness of happiness, above all—will not choose the intellect as a hiding-place for the treasure it holds most dear.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

97. There is nothing in all the world more just than happiness, nothing that will more faithfully adopt the form of our soul, or so carefully fill the space that our wisdom flings open. Yet is it most silent of all that there is in the world.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

98. To be happy is only to have freed

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one's soul from the unrest of happiness.—  
*Wisdom and Destiny.*

99. Happiness rarely is absent; it is we that know not of its presence.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

100. Are not joys to be met with on the highways of life that are greater than any misfortune, more momentous even than death? May a happiness not be encountered that the eye cannot see? and is it not of the nature of happiness to be less manifest than misfortune, to become ever less apparent to the eye as it reaches loftier heights? But to this we refuse to pay heed. The whole village, the town, will flock to the spot where some wretched adventure takes place; but there are none will pause for an instant and let their eyes rest on a kiss, or a vision of beauty that gladdens the soul, a ray of love that illumines the heart.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

101. Suffering, sorrow, tears, regrets—

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these words, that vary so slightly in meaning, are names that we give to emotions which in no two men are alike. If we probe to the heart of these words, these emotions, we find they are only the track that is left by our faults; and there where these faults were noble (for there are noble faults as there are mean or trivial virtues) our sorrow will be nearer akin to veritable happiness than the happiness of those whose consciousness still is confined within narrowest limits.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

102. We shall have added most strangely to our safety, our happiness and peace, the day that our sloth and our ignorance shall have ceased to term fatal, what should truly be looked on as human and natural by our intelligence and our energy.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

103. If all who count themselves happy were to tell, very simply, what it was that brought happiness to them, the others

## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

would see that between sorrow and joy the difference is but as between a gladsome, enlightened acceptance of life and a hostile, gloomy submission; between a large and harmonious conception of life, and one that is stubborn and narrow.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

104. Let us hope that one day all mankind will be happy and wise; and though this day never should dawn, to have hoped for it cannot be wrong. And in any event, it is helpful to speak of happiness to those who are sad, that thus at least they may learn what it is that happiness means.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

105. As man was created for health, so was mankind created for happiness; and to speak of its misery only, though that misery everywhere seem everlasting, is only to say words that fall lightly and soon are forgotten. Why not speak as though mankind were always on the eve of great certitude,

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of great joy? Thither, in truth, is man led by his instinct, though he never may live to behold the long-wished-for to-morrow.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

106. It is imperative that there should be some who dare speak, and think, and act, as though all men were happy; for otherwise, when the day comes for destiny to throw open wide the people's garden of the promised land, what happiness shall the others find there, what justice, what beauty or love?—*Wisdom and Destiny.*



III  
JUSTICE





### III

## JUSTICE

**I**T is difficult for us to imagine what the ideal justice will be, for every thought of ours that tends towards it is clogged by the injustice wherein we still dwell.—*The Buried Temple.*

108. He whose eyes can see the invisible, knows that in the soul of the most unjust man there is justice still: justice, with all her attributes, her stainless garments and holy activity. He knows that the soul of the sinner is ever balancing peace and love, and the consciousness of life, no less scrupulously than the soul of philosopher, saint, or hero; that it watches the smiles of earth and sky, and is no less aware of all whereby those smiles are destroyed, degraded, and poisoned.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

109. 'One has to pay for all things,' we

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say. Yes, in the depth of our heart, in all that pertains to man, justice exacts payment in the coin of our personal happiness or sorrow. And without, in the universe that enfolds us, there is also a reckoning; but here it is a different paymaster who measures our happiness or sorrow. Other laws obtain, there are other motives, other methods. It is no longer the justice of the conscience that presides, but the logic of nature, which cares nothing for our morality. Within us is a spirit that weighs only intentions, without us a power that only balances deeds. We try to persuade ourselves that these two work hand in hand. But in reality, though the spirit will often glance towards the power, this last is as completely ignorant of the other's existence as is the man weighing coals in Northern Europe of the existence of his fellow weighing diamonds in South Africa. We are constantly intruding our sense of justice into this non-

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moral logic; and herein lies the source of most of our errors.—*The Buried Temple.*

110. But what does it matter, some will ask, whether man do the thing that is just because he thinks God is watching—because he believes in a kind of justice that pervades the universe—or for the simple reason that to his conscience this thing seems just? It matters above all. We have there three different men. The first, whom God is watching, will do much that is not just, for every God whom man has hitherto worshipped has decreed many unjust things. And the second will not always act in the same way as the third, who is, indeed, the true man to whom the moralist will turn, for he will survive both the others; and to foretell how man will conduct himself in truth, which is his natural element, is more interesting to the moralist than to watch his behaviour when enmeshed in falsehood.—*The Buried Temple.*

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III. Is it not almost ludicrous that we, who within our four walls strive to be noble and faithful, pitiful, simple, and loyal; whose consciousness balances the nicest, most delicate problems, and rejects even the suspicion of a bitter thought, have no sooner gone into the street, and met faces that are unfamiliar, than, at that very instant, and without the least possibility of our having it otherwise, all pity, equity, love should be completely ignored by us? What dignity, what loyalty, can there be in this double life, so wise and humane, uplifted and thoughtful, this side the threshold, and beyond it so callous, so instinctive, and pitiless? For it is enough that we should feel the cold a little less than the labourer who passes by, that we should be better fed or clad than he, that we should buy any object that is not strictly indispensable, and we have unconsciously returned, through a thousand byways, to the ruthless act of

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primitive man, despoiling his weaker brother. There is no single privilege we enjoy but close investigation will prove it to be the result of a perhaps very remote abuse of power, an unknown violence or ruse of long ago; and all these we set in motion again as we sit at our table, stroll idly through the town, or lie at night in a bed that our own hands have not made. Nay, what is even the leisure that enables us to improve, to grow more compassionate and gentler, to think more fraternally of the injustice others endure—what is this, in truth, but the ripest fruit of the great injustice?—*The Buried Temple.*

112. All men love justice, but not with the same ardent, fierce, exclusive love; nor have they all the same scruples, the same sensitiveness, or the same deep conviction. We meet people of highly developed intellect, in whom the sense of what is just and unjust is yet infinitely less delicate, less clear-

## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

ly marked, than in others whose intellect would seem to be mediocre; for here a great part is played by that little known, ill-defined side of ourselves that we term the character.—*The Buried Temple*.

113. Have we sounded all the depths of nature, and is it only in our cerebro-spinal system that she becomes mind? And finally, what is justice when viewed from the heights? Is the intention necessarily at its centre; and can no regions exist where intentions no longer shall count? We should have to answer these questions, and many others, before we should be able to tell whether nature be just or unjust from the point of view of masses whose vastness corresponds to her own. She disposes of a future, a space, of which we can form no conception; and in these there exists, it may be, a justice proportioned to her duration, her extent and her aim, even as our own instinct of justice is proportioned to the dura-

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tion and narrow circle of our own life. The wrong that she may for centuries commit she has centuries in which to repair; but we who have only a few days before us, what right have we to imitate what our eye cannot see, understand, or follow?—*The Buried Temple*.

114. What right have we to complain of the indifference of the universe, what right to declare it incomprehensible and monstrous? Why this surprise at an injustice in which we ourselves have taken so active a part? It is true that no trace of justice can be found in disease, accident, or most of the hazards of external life, which fall indiscriminately on the good and the wicked, the hero and the traitor, the prisoner and the sister of charity. But we are far too eager to include under the title 'Justice of the Universe' many a flagrant act that is exclusively human, and infinitely more common and more destructive than



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disease, the hurricane, or fire. I do not allude to war; it might be urged that we attribute this rather to the will of the peoples or kings than to nature. But poverty, for instance, which we still rank with irremediable ills, such as shipwreck or plague; poverty, with all its crushing sorrows and transmitted degeneration—how often may this be ascribed to the injustice of the elements, and how often to the injustice of our social condition, which is the crowning injustice of man? Need we, at the sight of unmerited wretchedness, look to the skies for a reason, as though a flash of lightning had caused it? Need we seek an impenetrable, unfathomable Judge? Is this region not our own; are we not here in the best explored, best known portion of our dominion; and is it not we who organise misery, we who spread it abroad, as arbitrarily, from the moral point of view, as fire and disease scatter destruction or suffering? Is it rea-

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sonable that we should wonder at the sea's indifference to the soul-state of its victims, when we who have a soul, the pre-eminent organ of justice, pay no heed whatever to the innocence of the countless thousands whom we ourselves sacrifice, who are our own wretched victims?—*The Buried Temple.*

115. Yes, it is open to you, if you choose, to regard as a very poor thing this unsubstantial justice; since its only reward is a vague satisfaction, which even grows hateful, and destroys itself, the moment its presence becomes too perceptibly felt. Bear in mind, however, that all things that happen in our moral being must be equally lightly held, if regarded from the point of view whence you deliver this judgment. Love is a paltry affair, the moment of possession once over that alone is real and ensures the perpetuity of the race; and yet we find that as man grows more civi-

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lised, the act of possessioning assumes ever less value in his eyes if there go not with it, if there do not precede and follow it, this insignificant emotion built up of our thoughts and our feelings, of our sweetest and tenderest hours and years. Beauty, too, is a trivial matter: a beautiful spectacle, a beautiful face, or body, or gesture; a melodious voice, or noble statue—sunrise at sea, flowers in a garden, stars shining over the forest, the river by moonlight—or a lofty thought, an exquisite poem, an heroic sacrifice hidden in a profound and pitiful soul. We may admire these things for an instant; they may bring us a sense of completeness no other joy can convey; but at the same time there will steal over us a tinge of strange sorrow, unrest; nor will they give happiness to us, as men use the word, should other events have contrived to make us unhappy. They produce nothing the eye can measure, or weigh; nothing

## Justice

that others can see, or will envy; and yet, were a magician suddenly to appear, capable of depriving one of us of this sense of beauty that may chance to be in him, possessed of the power of extinguishing it for ever, with no trace remaining, no hope that it ever would spring into being again—would we not rather lose riches, tranquillity, health even, and many years of our life, than this strange faculty which none can espy, and we ourselves can scarcely define?—*The Buried Temple.*

116. The injustice of nature ends by becoming justice for the race; she has time before her, she can wait, her injustice is of her girth. But for us it is too overwhelming, and our days are too few. Let us be satisfied that force should reign in the universe, but equity in our hearts.—*The Buried Temple.*

117. Man has always endeavoured to justify his injustice; and when human jus-

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tice offered him no excuse or pretext, he found in the will of the gods a law superior to the justice of man. But our excuse or pretext of to-day is fraught with the more peril to our morality inasmuch as it reposes on a law, or at least a habit, of nature, that is far more real, more incontestable and universal than the will of an ephemeral and local god.—*The Buried Temple*.

118. We tell ourselves—boldly at times, but more often in a whisper—that we are nature's children, and bound therefore in all things to conform to her laws and copy her example. And since nature regards justice with indifference, since she has another aim, which is the sustaining, the renewing, the incessant development, of life, it follows. . . . So far we have not formulated the conclusion, or, at least, this conclusion has not yet dared openly to force its way into our morality; but, although its influence has hitherto only been remotely

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felt in that familiar sphere which includes our relations, our friends, and our immediate surroundings, it is slowly penetrating into the vast and desolate region whither we relegate all those whom we know not and see not, who for us have no name. It is already to be found at the root of many of our actions; it has entered our politics, our industry, our commerce; indeed it affects all we do from the moment we emerge from the narrow circle of our domestic hearth, the only place for the majority of men where a little veritable justice is still to be found, a little benevolence, a little love. It will call itself economic or social law, evolution, competition, struggle for life; it will masquerade under a thousand names, forever perpetrating the selfsame wrong.—*The Buried Temple*.

119. As our physical organism was devised for existence in the atmosphere of our globe, so is our moral organism devised for

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existence in justice. Every faculty craves for it, is more intimately bound up with it than with the laws of gravitation, of light or heat; and to throw ourselves into injustice is to plunge headlong into the hostile and the unknown.—*The Buried Temple*.

120. The man of genius who forsakes the equity that the humblest peasant has at heart will find all paths strange to him; and these will be stranger still should he overstep the limit his own sense of justice imposes; for the justice that soars aloft, keeping pace with the intellect, creates new boundaries around all it throws open, while at the same time strengthening and rendering more insurmountable still the ancient barriers of instinct. The moment we cross the primitive frontier of equity all things seem to fail us; one falsehood gives birth to a hundred, and treachery returns to us through a thousand channels.—*The Buried Temple*.

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121. An act of injustice must always shake the confidence a man had in himself and his destiny; at a given moment, and that generally of the gravest, he has ceased to rely upon himself alone; and this will not be forgotten, nor will he ever again be wholly himself. He has confused and probably corrupted his fortune by the introduction of strange powers. He has lost the exact sense of his personality and of the force that is in him. He can no longer clearly distinguish between what is his own and comes from himself, and what he is constantly borrowing from the pernicious collaborators whom his weakness has summoned. He has ceased to be the general who has none but disciplined soldiers in the army of his thoughts; he becomes the usurping chief around whom are only accomplices. He has forsworn the dignity of the man who will have none of the glory at which his heart can only smile as sadly as



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an ardent, unhappy lover would smile at a faithless mistress.—*The Buried Temple*.

122. Napoleon committed three crowning acts of injustice: three celebrated crimes that were so fatally unjust to his own fortune. The first was the murder of the Duc d'Enghien, condemned by order, without trial or proof, and executed in the trenches of Vincennes,—an assassination that sowed insatiable hatred and vengeance in the path of the guilty dictator. Then the detestable intrigues whereby he lured the too trustful, easy-going Bourbons to Bayonne, that he might rob them of their hereditary crown; and the horrible war that ensued, a war that cost the lives of three hundred thousand men, swallowed up all the morality and energy of the empire, most of its prestige, almost all its convictions, almost all the devotion it inspired, and engulfed its prosperous destiny. And finally the frightful, unpardonable Russian campaign, wherein

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his fortune came at last to utter shipwreck amid the ice of the Berezina and the snow-bound Polish steppes.

‘These prodigious catastrophes,’ I said, ‘had numberless causes; but when we have slowly traced our way through all the more or less unforeseen circumstances, have marked the gradual change in Napoleon’s character, and noted the acts of imprudence, folly, and violence which this genius committed; when we have seen how deliberately he brought disaster to his smiling fortune, may we not almost believe that what we behold, standing erect at the very fountain-head of calamity, is no other than the silent shadow of misunderstood human justice? Human justice, possessing nothing supernatural, nothing very mysterious; built up of many thousand very real little incidents, many thousand falsehoods, many thousand little offences, of which each one gave rise to a corresponding act of retaliation—hu-

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man justice, and not a power that suddenly, at some tragic moment, leaps forth like Minerva of old, fully armed, from the formidable, despotic brow of destiny. In all this there is only one thing of mystery, and that is the eternal presence of human justice.'—*The Buried Temple*.

**IV**  
**MORALITY**



## IV

### MORALITY

**T**HE instinct of happiness within us needs no telling that he who is morally right must be happier than he who is wrong, though the wrong be done from the height of a throne.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

124. To attribute morality to fate is but to lessen the purity of our ideal; to admit the injustice of fate is to throw open before us the ever-widening fields of a still loftier morality.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

125. Even though a moral law seem on the eve of disappearing, we need have no cause for disquiet; its place will be speedily filled by a law that is greater still.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

126. Let us not forget that it is from the very non-morality of destiny that a nobler morality must spring into life; for

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here, as everywhere, man is never so strong with his own native strength as when he realises that he stands entirely alone.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

127. It is a particular form of life that we represent on this planet—the life of feeling and thought; whence it follows perhaps that all that inclines to weaken the ardour of feeling and thought is, in its essence, immoral.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

128. The time must come, sooner or later, when our morality will have to conform to the probable mission of the race, and the arbitrary, often ridiculous, restrictions whereof it is at present composed will be compelled to make way for the inevitable, logical restrictions this mission exacts. For the individual, as for the race, there can be but one code of morals—the subordination of the methods of life to the demands of the general mission that ap-

## Morality

pears entrusted to man. The axis will shift, therefore, of many sins, many great offences; until at last for all the crimes against the body there shall be substituted the veritable crimes against human destiny: in other words, whatever may tend to impair the authority, integrity, leisure, liberty, or power of the intellect.—*The Buried Temple.*

129. Man's moral value is doubtless established by the number of duties he sees and sets forth to accomplish.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

130. It is given to very few hearts to be naïvely perfect, nor should we go seek in them for the laws of duty.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

131. 'Of what avail are my loftiest thoughts if I have ceased to exist?' there are some will ask; to whom others, it may be, will answer, 'What becomes of myself if all that I love in my heart and my spirit



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must die, that my life may be saved?' And are not almost all morals, and heroism, and virtue of man summed up in that single choice?—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

132. Ennoblement comes to man in the degree that his consciousness quickens, and the nobler the man has become, the profounder must consciousness be. Admirable exchange takes place here; and even as love is insatiable in its craving for love, so is consciousness insatiable in its craving for growth, for moral uplifting: and moral uplifting forever is yearning for consciousness.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

133. As you climb up a mountain towards nightfall, the trees and the houses, the steeple, the fields and the orchards, the road and even the river, will gradually dwindle and fade, and at last disappear in the gloom that steals over the valley. But the threads of light that shine from the houses of men and pierce through the

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blackest of nights, these shine on undimmed. And every step that you take to the summit reveals more, and more in the hamlets asleep at your foot. For light, though so fragile, is perhaps the one thing of all that yields naught of itself as it faces immensity. Thus it is with our moral light too, when we look upon life from some slight elevation. It is well that reflection should teach us to disburden our soul of base passions; but it should not discourage, or weaken, our humblest desire for justice, for truth, and for love.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

134. Marcus Aurelius—than whom perhaps none ever craved more earnestly for justice, or possessed a soul more wisely impressionable, more nobly sensitive—Marcus Aurelius never asked himself what might be happening outside that admirable little circle of light wherein his virtue and consciousness, his divine meekness and piety,

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had gathered those who were near him, his friends and his servants. Infinite iniquity, he knew full well, stretched around him on every side; but with this he had no concern. To him it seemed a thing that must be, mysterious and sacred as the mighty ocean; the boundless domain of the gods, of fatality, of laws unknown and superior, irresistible, irresponsible, and eternal. It did not lessen his courage; on the contrary, it enhanced his confidence, his concentration, and spurred him upwards, like the flame that, confined to a narrow area, rises higher and higher, alone in the night, urged on by the darkness. He accepted the decree of fate, that allotted slavery to the bulk of mankind. Sorrowfully, but with full conviction, did he submit to the irrevocable law; wherein he once again gave proof of his piety and his virtue. He retired into himself; and there, in a kind of sunless, motionless void, became still more

## Morality

just, still more humane.—*The Buried Temple.*

135. The great mischief, the one which destroys our moral existence and threatens the integrity of our mind and our character, is not that we should deceive ourselves and love an uncertain truth, but that we should remain constant to one in which we no longer wholly believe.—*The Buried Temple.*

136. When we say that nature is unjust, we are in effect complaining of her indifference to our own little virtues, our own little intentions, our own little deeds of heroism; and it is our vanity far more than our sense of equity that considers itself aggrieved. Our morality is proportionate to our nature and our restricted destiny; nor have we the right to forsake it because it is not on the scale of the immensity and infinite destiny of the universe.—*The Buried Temple.*

137. In truth all our justice, morality,

## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

all our thoughts and feelings, derive from three or four primordial necessities, whereof the principal one is food. The least modification of one of these necessities would entail a marked change in our moral existence. Were the belief one day to become general that man could nourish himself without animal food, there would ensue not only a great economic revolution and change,—for a bullock, to produce one pound of meat, consumes more than a hundred pounds of provender,—but a moral improvement as well; for we find that the man who abandons the regimen of meat abandons alcohol also; and to do this is to renounce most of the coarser and degraded pleasures of life. And it is in the passionate craving for these pleasures, in their glamour, and the prejudice they create, that the most formidable obstacle is found to the harmonious development of the race.

—*The Buried Temple.*

## Morality

138. It is the way in which hours of freedom are spent that determines, as much as war or as labour, the moral worth of a nation. It raises or lowers, it replenishes or exhausts. At present we find, in these great cities of ours, that three days' idleness will fill the hospitals with victims whom weeks or months of toil had left unscathed.—*The Buried Temple*.

139. Some men there are whose virtue issues from them with a noise of clanging gates; in others it dwells as silent as the maid who never stirs from home, but sits thoughtfully by the fireside, always ready to welcome those who enter from the cold without.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

140. Above all, let us never forget that an act of goodness is of itself always an act of happiness. It is the flower of a long inner life of joy and contentment; it tells of peaceful hours and days on the sunniest heights of our soul.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

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141. It is possible, perhaps, that to be good is only to be in a little light what all are in darkness.—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

142. Hostile forces at once take possession of all that is vacant within us, nor filled by the strength of our soul; and whatever is void in the heart or the mind becomes a fountain of fatal influence.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

143. There may be human joy in doing good with definite purpose, but they who do good expecting nothing know a joy that is divine. Where we do evil our reasons mostly are known to us, but our good deed becomes the purer for our ignorance of its motive.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

144. The slightest act of justice or love demands a very torrent of desire for good. For our conduct only to be honest we must have thoughts within us ten times loftier than our conduct. Even to keep somewhat

## Morality

clear of evil bespeaks enormous craving for good. Of all the forces in the world there is none melts so quickly away as the thought that has to descend into everyday life; wherefore we must needs be heroic in thought for our deeds to pass muster, or at the least be harmless.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

145. All that is best in the good that at this day is being done round about us, was conceived in the spirit of one of those who neglected, it may be, many an urgent, immediate duty in order to think, to commune with themselves, in order to speak.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

146. We no longer believe in the ideals once held by saints, and we are confident that a wise God will hold of as little account the duty done through hope of recompense, as the evil done for sake of gain; and this even though the recompense hoped for be nothing but the self-ensuing peace of mind.



## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

We say that God, who must be at least as high as the highest thoughts He has implanted in the best of men, will withhold His smile from those who have desired but to please Him; and that they only who have done good for the sake of good and as though He existed not, they only who have loved virtue more than they have loved God Himself, shall be allowed to stand by His side.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

147. In a morbid virtue there is often more harm than there is in a healthy vice.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

148. To commit an act of injustice is to prove that we have not yet attained the happiness within our grasp. And in evil, if we reduce things to their primal elements, we find that even the wicked are seeking some measure of peace, a certain up-lifting of soul. They may think themselves happy, and rejoice for such dole as may come to them; but would it have satisfied Marcus

## Morality

Aurelius, who knew the lofty tranquillity, the great quickening of the soul? Show a vast lake to the child who has never beheld the sea, it will clap its hands and be glad, and think the sea is before it; but therefore none the less does the veritable sea exist.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

149. In this world it is far more certain that vice will be punished, than that virtue will meet with reward; yet we must bear in mind that it is the habit of crime to shriek aloud beneath its punishment, whereas virtue rewards itself in the silence that is the walled garden of its happiness.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

150. Let us sometimes, in our meditations, bring our desire for moral perfection to the level of daily truth, and be taught how far easier it is to confer occasional benefit than never to do any harm; to bring occasional happiness than never be cause of tears.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

151. A good thought or deed brings a reward to our heart that it cannot, in the absence of a universal judge of nature, extend to the things around. It endeavours to create within us the happiness it is unable to produce in our material life. Denied all external outlet, it fills our soul the more.—*The Buried Temple.*

152. Let us not resent the misfortunes that sometimes befall virtue, lest we at the same time disturb the limpid essence of its happiness.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

153. There is more active charity in the egoism of a strenuous, far-seeing soul than in all the devotion of the soul that is helpless and blind.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

**V**  
**SILENCE**



## V

### SILENCE

**T**HERE is an instinct of the super-human truths within us which warns us that it is dangerous to be silent with one whom we do not wish to know, or do not love.—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

155. It is idle to think that, by means of words, any real communication can ever pass from one man to another. The lips or the tongue may represent the soul, even as a cipher or a number may represent a picture by Memling; but from the moment that we have *something to say to each other*, we are *compelled* to hold our peace; and if at such times we do not listen to the urgent commands of silence, invisible though they be, we shall have suffered an eternal loss that all the treasures of human wisdom cannot make good; for we shall have let slip

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the opportunity of listening to another soul, and of giving existence, be it only for an instant, to our own; and many lives there are in which such opportunities do not present themselves twice. . . .—*The Treasure of the Humble*.

156. We cannot conceive what sort of man is he who has never been silent. It is to us as though his soul were featureless.—*The Treasure of the Humble*.

157. Thousands and thousands of things quiver in silence on the lips of true friendship and love, that are not to be found in the silence of other lips, to which friendship and love are unknown.—*The Treasure of the Humble*.

158. Remember the day on which, without fear in your heart, you met your first silence. The dread hour had sounded; silence went before your soul. You saw it rising from the unspeakable abysses of life, from the depths of the inner sea of

## Silence

horror or beauty, and you did not fly.  
. . . It was at a home-coming, on the threshold of a departure, in the midst of a great joy, at the pillow of a death-bed, on the approach of a dire misfortune. Be-  
think you of those moments when all the secret jewels shone forth on you, and the slumbering truths sprung to life; and tell me whether silence, then, was not good and necessary, whether the caresses of the enemy you had so persistently shunned were not truly divine?—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

159. There are as many eternal minutes in the week that goes by in silence, as in the one that comes boldly towards us with mighty shout and clamour.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

160. There is an instinct of the super-human truths within us which warns us that it is dangerous to be silent with one whom we do not wish to know, or do not



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love: for words may pass between men, but let silence have had its instant of activity, and it will never efface itself; and indeed the true life, the only life that leaves a trace behind, is made up of silence alone. Bethink it well, in that silence to which you must again have recourse, so that it may explain itself, by itself; and if it be granted to you to descend for one moment into your soul, into the depths where the angels dwell, it is not the words spoken by the creature you loved so dearly that you will recall, or the gestures that he made, but it is, above all, the silences that you have lived together that will come back to you: for it is the *quality* of those silences that alone revealed the quality of your love and your souls.—*The Treasure of the Humble*.

161. We can bear, when need must be, the silence of ourselves, that of isolation: but the silence of many—silence multiplied—and above all the silence of a crowd—

## Silence

these are supernatural burdens, whose inexplicable weight brings dread to the mightiest soul.—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

162. There are men in whose presence the greatest of heroes would not dare to be silent; and even the soul that has nothing to conceal trembles lest another should discover its secret.—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

163. Some there are that have no silence, and that kill the silence around them, and these are the only creatures that pass through life unperceived.—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

164. 'We do not know each other yet,' wrote to me one whom I hold dear above all others; 'we have not yet dared to be silent together.' And it was true: already did we love each other so deeply that we shrank from the superhuman ordeal. And each time that silence fell upon us—the angel of the supreme truth, the messenger

## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

that brings to the heart the tidings of the unknown—each time did we feel that our souls were craving mercy on their knees, were begging for a few hours more of innocent falsehood, a few hours of ignorance, a few hours of childhood. . . . And none the less must its hour come. It is the sun of love, and it ripens the fruit of the soul, as the sun of heaven ripens the fruits of the earth.—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

165. Though all words may be akin, every silence differs from its fellow; and, with rare exceptions, it is an entire destiny that will be governed by the *quality* of this first silence which is descending upon two souls. They blend: we know not where, for the reservoirs of silence lie far above the reservoirs of thought, and the strange resultant brew is either sinisterly bitter or profoundly sweet.—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

## Silence

166. In the lives of most of us, it will not happen more than twice or thrice that silence is really understood and freely admitted.—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

167. No sooner are the lips still than the soul awakens, and sets forth on its labours; for silence is an element that is full of surprises, danger and happiness, and in these the soul possesses itself in freedom. If it be indeed your desire to give yourself over to another, be silent; and if you fear being silent with him—unless this fear be the proud uncertainty, or hunger, of the love that yearns for prodigies—fly from him, for your soul knows well how far it may go.—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

168. The kisses of the silence of misfortune—and it is above all at times of misfortune that silence caresses us—can never be forgotten.—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

169. It is not silence that determines

## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

and fixes the savour of love?—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

170. There is no silence more docile than the silence of love, and it is indeed the only one that we may claim for ourselves alone. The other great silences, those of death, grief, or destiny, do not belong to us. They come towards us at their own hour, following in the track of events, and those whom they do not meet need not reproach themselves. But we can all go forth to meet the silences of love. They lie in wait for us, night and day, at our threshold, and are no less beautiful than their brothers. And it is thanks to them that those who have seldom wept may know the life of the soul almost as intimately as those to whom much grief has come: and therefore it is that such of us as have loved deeply have learnt many secrets that are unknown to others.—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

## Silence

171. Were I to speak to you at this moment of the gravest things of all—of love, death or destiny—it is not love, death or destiny that I should touch; and, my efforts notwithstanding, there would always remain between us a truth which had not been spoken, which we had not even thought of speaking, and yet it is this truth only, voiceless though it has been, which will have lived with us for an instant, and by which we shall have been wholly absorbed. For that truth was *our truth* as regards death, destiny or love, and it was in silence only that we could perceive it. And nothing save only the silence will have had any importance.—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

172. ‘My sisters,’ says a child in the fairy-story, ‘you have each of you a secret thought—I wish to know it.’ We, too, have something that people wish to know, but it is hidden far above the secret thought

## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

—it is our secret silence.—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

173. As gold and silver are weighed in pure water, so does the soul test its weight in silence, and the words that we let fall have no meaning apart from the silence that wraps them round. If I tell some one that I love him—as I may have told a hundred others—my words will convey nothing to him; but the silence which will ensue, if I do indeed love him, will make clear in what depths lie the roots of my love, and will in its turn give birth to a conviction, that shall itself be silent; and in the course of a lifetime, this silence and this conviction will never again be the same. . . .  
—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

174. 'It is in the silence that follows the storm,' says a Hindu proverb, 'and not in the silence before it, that we should search for the budding flower.'—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

## Silence

175. So far I have considered *active* silence only, for there is a *passive* silence, which is the shadow of sleep, of death or non-existence. It is the silence of lethargy, and is even less to be dreaded than speech, so long as it slumbers; but beware lest a sudden incident awake it, for then would its brother, the great active silence, at once rear himself upon his throne. Be on your guard. Two souls would draw near each other: the barriers would fall asunder, the gates fly open, and the life of every day be replaced by a life of deepest earnest, wherein all are defenceless; a life in which laughter dares not show itself, in which there is no obeying, in which nothing can evermore be forgotten. . . .—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

176. Two souls, admirable both and of equal power, may yet give birth to a hostile silence, and wage pitiless war against each other in the darkness; while it may be that



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the soul of a convict shall go forth and commune in divine silence with the soul of a virgin. The result can never be foretold; all this comes to pass in a heaven that never warns; and therefore it is that the tenderest of lovers will often defer to the last hour of all the solemn entry of the great revealer of the depths of our being. . . .

—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

177. The human soul is very silent.  
. . . The human soul loves to be alone when its last hour has come. . . .

—*Pelléas and Mélisande.*

**VI**  
**DESTINY AND FATALITY**



## VI

### DESTINY AND FATALITY

**L**OFTY thoughts suffice not always to overcome destiny; for against these destiny can oppose thoughts that are loftier still; but what destiny has ever withstood thoughts that are simple and good, thoughts that are tender and loyal?—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

179. Is our true destiny to be found in the things which take place about us, or in that which abides in our soul?—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

180. Instinct and destiny are for ever conferring together; they support one another, and rove, hand in hand, round the man who is not on his guard. And whoever is able to curb the blind force of instinct within him is able to curb the force of external destiny also.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

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181. The breath of air by the door I opened, one evening, was forever to extinguish my happiness, as it would have extinguished a flickering lamp; and now, when I think of it, I cannot tell myself that I did not know. . . . And yet, it was nothing important that had taken me to the threshold. I could have gone away shrugging my shoulders; there was no human reason that could force me to knock on the panel. No human reason, nothing but destiny. . . . —*Wisdom and Destiny*.

182. That destiny is beautiful wherein each event, though charged with joy or sadness, has brought reflection to us, has added something to our range of soul, has given us greater peace wherewith to cling to life.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

183. At Erfurt, in his famous interview with Goethe, Napoleon is said to have spoken disparagingly of the dramas in

## Destiny and Fatality

which fatality plays a great part,—the plays that we, in our ‘passion for calamity,’ are apt to consider the finest. ‘They belong,’ he remarked, ‘to an epoch of darkness; but how can fatality touch us to-day? Policy—*that* is fatality!’ Napoleon’s dictum is not very profound; policy is only the merest fragment of fatality; and his destiny soon made it manifest to him that the desire to contain fatality within the narrow bounds of policy was no more than a vain endeavour to imprison in a fragile vase the mightiest of the spiritual rivers that bathe our globe. And yet, incomplete as this thought of Napoleon’s may have been, it still throws some light on the tributary of the great river. It was a little thing, perhaps, but on these uncertain shores it is the difference between a little thing and nothing that kindles the energy of man and confirms his destiny. By this ray of light, such as it was, he long was enabled to dominate all

## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

that portion of the unknown which he declined to term fatality.—*The Buried Temple.*

184. Fatality does not leap forth at a given moment from an inexorable, inaccessible, unfathomable abyss. It is built up of the energy, the desires and suffering, the thoughts and passions of our brothers; and these passions should be well known to us, for they differ not from our own.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

185. Real fatality exists only in certain external disasters,—as disease, accident, the sudden death of those we love; but *inner fatality* there is none.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

186. Speak not of destiny when the event that has brought you joy or sadness has still altered nothing in your manner of regarding the universe. All that remains to us when love and glory are over, when adventures and passions have faded

## Destiny and Fatality

into the past, is but a deeper and ever deepening sense of the infinite; and if we have not that within us, then are we destitute indeed.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

187. Not by the extent of empire is the range of destiny governed, but, indeed, by the depth of our soul.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

188. It happens to the majority of men as with a little bewildered stream I chanced to espy one evening as I stood on the hillside. I beheld it far down in the valley, staggering, struggling, climbing, falling: blindly groping its way to the great lake that slumbered, the other side of the forest, in the peace of the dawn. Here it was a block of basalt that forced the streamlet to wind round and about four times; there, the roots of a hoary tree; further on still, the mere recollection of an obstacle, now gone for ever, thrust it back to its source, bubbling in impotent fury, divided for all time



## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

from its goal and its gladness. But, in another direction, at right angles almost to the distraught, unhappy, useless stream, a force superior to the force of instinct had traced a long, greenish canal, calm, peaceful, deliberate; that flowed steadily across the country, across the crumbling stones, across the obedient forest, on its clear and unerring, unhurrying way from its distant source on the horizon to the same tranquil, shining lake. And I had at my feet before me the image of the two great destinies offered to man.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

189. Each century holds another sorrow dear, for each century discerns another destiny.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

190. All destinies are forever commingling; and the adventure is rare in whose web the hempen thread blends not with the golden.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

191. There are, I know, many things more beautiful than tears, and it were often

## Destiny and Fatality

better not to cry. . . . But when our tears flow, notwithstanding all our efforts, then must we needs believe in the truth of them, and tell ourselves that there is something in them truer still than all the things of beauty we see above them. . . . For, look you, Selysette, it is often destiny that speaks through our tears, and it is perhaps from out the very depths of the future that they flow into our eyes.—*Aglavaine and Selysette*.

192. There is in Flanders a breed of draught-dogs upon which destiny alternately lavishes her favour and her spite. Some will be bought by a butcher, and lead a magnificent life. The work is trifling: in the morning, harnessed four abreast, they draw a light cart to the slaughter-house; and at night, galloping joyously, triumphantly, home through the narrow streets of the ancient towns with their tiny, lit-up gables, bring it back overflowing with meat.

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Between-times there is leisure, and marvelous leisure, among the rats and the waste of the slaughter-house. They are copiously fed, they are fat, they shine like seals, and taste in its fullness the only happiness dreamed of by the naïve, ferreting instinct of the honest dog. But their unfortunate brethren of the same litter, that the lame sand-pedlar buys, or the old collector of household refuse, or the needy peasant with his great cruel clogs—these are chained to heavy carts or shapeless barrows; they are filthy, mangy, hairless, emaciated, starving; and follow till they die the circles of a hell into which they were thrust by a few coppers dropped into some horny palm. And, in a world less directly subject to man, there must evidently be partridges, pheasants, deer, hares, which have no luck, which never escape the gun; while others, one knows not how or why, emerge unscathed from every battue.—*The Buried Temple.*

**VII**  
**WISDOM AND REASON**



## VII

### WISDOM AND REASON

**W**ISDOM, perhaps, is only the sense of the infinite applied to our moral life.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

194. It is not by renouncing the joys that are near to us that we shall grow wise; but as we grow wise we unconsciously abandon the joys that now are beneath us.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

195. Those thinkers have learned to love wisdom with a far more intimate love whose lives have been happy, than those whose lives have been sad. The wisdom forced into growth by misfortune is different far from the wisdom that ripens beneath happiness. The first where it seeks to console, must whisper of happiness; the other tells of itself. He who is sad is taught by his wisdom that happiness yet may be

## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

his; he who is happy is taught by his wisdom that he may become wiser still.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

196. Ours is the choice—whether wisdom shall be the honoured wife of our passions and feelings, our thoughts and desires, or the melancholy bride of death. Let the tomb have its stagnant wisdom, but let there be wisdom also for the hearth where the fire still burns.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

197. Wisdom is the lamp of love, and love is the oil of the lamp. Love, sinking deeper, grows wiser; and wisdom that springs up aloft comes ever the nearer to love. If you love, you must needs become wise; be wise and you surely shall love.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

198. Reason and love battle fiercely at first in the soul that begins to expand; but wisdom is born of the peace that at last comes to pass between reason and love.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

## Wisdom and Reason

199. Love is the food of wisdom; wisdom, the food of love; a circle of light within which those who love clasp the hands of those who are wise. Wisdom and love are one; and in Swedenborg's Paradise the wife is 'the love of the wisdom of the wise.'—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

200. In reason no love can be found—there is much love in wisdom; and all that is highest in wisdom entwines around all that is purest in love. Love is the form most divine of the infinite, and also, because most divine, the form most profoundly human. Why should we not say that wisdom is the triumph of reason divine over reason of man?—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

201. Truly wise you are not unless your wisdom be constantly changing from your childhood on to your death.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

202. Wisdom one day said to reason, It were well to love one's enemies and re-



## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

turn good for evil. Reason, that day, tip-toe on the loftiest peak in its kingdom, at last was fain to agree. But wisdom is not yet content, and seeks ever further alone.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

203. If Jesus Christ and Socrates both were to meet the adulterous woman, the words that their reason would prompt them to speak would vary but little; but belonging to different worlds would be the working of the wisdom within them, far beyond words and far beyond thoughts. For differences such as these are of the very essence of wisdom.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

204. Reason defends and withdraws; forbids, rejects, and destroys. Wisdom advances, attacks, and adds; increases, creates, and commands. Reason produces not wisdom, which is rather a craving of soul.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

205. He is wise who at last sees in suffering only the light that it sheds on his soul;

## Wisdom and Reason

and whose eyes never rest on the shadow it casts upon those who have sent it towards him. And wiser still is the man to whom sorrow and joy not only bring increase of consciousness, but also the knowledge that something exists superior to consciousness even.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

206. Strangely enough, it is not in our reason that moral life has its being; and he who would let reason govern his life would be the most wretched of men. There is not a virtue, a beautiful thought, or a generous deed, but has most of its roots hidden far away from that which can be understood or explained.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

207. In unconsciousness we ever must dwell; but are able to purify, day after day, the unconsciousness that wraps us around.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

208. Reason flings open the door to wisdom; but the most living wisdom finds itself not in reason. Reason bars the gate to

## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

malevolent destiny; but wisdom, far away on the horizon, throws open another gate to propitious wisdom.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

209. He who knows himself is wise; yet we have no sooner acquired real consciousness of our being than we learn that true wisdom is a thing that lies far deeper than consciousness. The chief gain of increased consciousness is that it unveils an ever loftier unconsciousness, on whose heights do the sources lie of the purest wisdom.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

210. It is only one side of morality that unhappiness throws into light; and the man whom sorrow has taught to be wise, is like one who has loved and never been loved in return.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

211. A great deed of heroism fascinates us; our eyes cannot travel beyond the act itself; but insignificant thoughts and deeds lead us on to the horizon beyond them; and

## Wisdom and Reason

is not the shining star of human wisdom always situate on the horizon?—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

212. It is of the nature of wisdom to despise nothing; indeed, in this world there is perhaps only one thing truly contemptible, and that thing is contempt itself.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

213. The friend is not wise who will not confide in his friend, remembering always that friendship may come to an end; nor the lover, who draws back for fear lest he may find shipwreck in love. For here, were we twenty times unfortunate, it is still only the perishable portion of our energy for happiness that suffers; and what is wisdom after all but this same energy for happiness cleansed of all that is impure?—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

214. The supreme endeavour of wisdom is only to seek in life for the fixed point of happiness; but to seek this fixed point

## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

in renunciation and farewell to joy, is only to seek it in death.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

215. Were we to allow our clear ideas only to govern our life, we should quickly become undeserving of either much love or esteem. For, truly, what could be less clear than the reasons that bid us be generous, upright and just; that teach us to cherish in all things the noblest of feelings and thoughts?—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

216. To disdain is only too easy, not so to understand; but in him who is truly wise there passes no thought of disdain, but it will, sooner or later, evolve into full comprehension.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

217. In the history of human reason, the greatest and the justest thoughts are not always those which attain the loftiest heights. It happens somewhat with the

## Wisdom and Reason

thoughts of men as with a fountain; for it is only because the water has been imprisoned and escapes through a narrow opening that it soars so proudly into the air. As it issues from the opening and hurls itself towards the sky, it would seem to despise the great, illimitable, motionless lake that stretches out far beneath it. And yet, say what one will, it is the lake that is right. For all its apparent motionlessness, for all its silence, it is tranquilly accomplishing the immense and normal task of the most important element of our globe; and the jet of water is merely a curious incident, which soon returns into the universal scheme. To us, the species is the great, unerring lake; and this even from the point of view of the superior human reason that it would seem at times to offend. Its idea is the vastest of all, and contains every other; it embraces limitless time and space. And does not each day that goes by reveal

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more and more clearly to us that the vastest idea, no matter where it reside, always ends by becoming the most just and most reasonable, the wisest, and the most beautiful?—

*The Buried Temple.*

**VIII**  
**DUTY AND SELF-SACRIFICE**





## VIII

### DUTY AND SELF-SACRIFICE

**T**HE paramount duty of all is to throw our conception of duty into clearest possible light.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

219. In this world there are thousands of weak, noble creatures who fancy that sacrifice always must be the last word of duty; thousands of beautiful souls that know not what should be done, and seek only to yield up their life, holding that to be virtue supreme. They are wrong; supreme virtue consists in the knowledge of what should be done, in the power to decide for ourselves whereto we should offer our life.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

220. The word duty itself will often contain far more error and moral indifference than virtue.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

221. It is not by self-sacrifice that lofti-

## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

ness comes to the soul; but as the soul becomes loftier, sacrifice fades out of sight, as the flowers in the valley disappear from the vision of him who toils up the mountain.

—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

222. To the soul that is slowly awakening all appears sacrifice.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

223. Sacrifice may be a flower that virtue will pluck on its road, but it was not to gather this flower that virtue set forth on its travels.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

224. It is, as a rule, far easier to sacrifice self—to give up, that is, our moral existence to the first one who chooses to take it—than to fulfil our spiritual destiny, to accomplish, right to the end, the task for which we were created.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

225. Before giving, let us try to acquire; for this last is a duty wherefrom we are not relieved by the fact of our giving.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

## Duty and Self-Sacrifice

226. Sacrifice is a beautiful token of unrest; but unrest should not be nurtured in us for the sake of itself.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

227. Why not admit that it is not our paramount duty to weep with all those who are weeping, to suffer with all who are sad, to expose our heart to the passer-by for him to caress or stab? Tears and suffering and wounds are helpful to us only when they do not discourage our life. Let us never forget that whatever our mission may be in this world, whatever the aim of our efforts and hopes, and the result of our joys and our sorrows, we are, above all, the blind custodians of life.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

228. We may possibly not be good, or noble, or beautiful, even in the midst of the greatest sacrifice; and the sister of charity who dies by the bedside of a typhoid patient may perchance have a mean, rancorous,

## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

miserable soul.—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

229. Nearly all the great things of this world have been done by men who concerned themselves not at all with ideas of self-sacrifice. Plato's thoughts flew on—he paused not to let his tears fall with the tears of the mourners in Athens; Newton pursued his experiments calmly, nor left them to search for objects of pity or sorrow; and Marcus Aurelius above all (for here we touch on the most frequent and dangerous form of self-sacrifice), Marcus Aurelius essayed not to dim the brightness of his soul that he might confer happiness on the inferior soul of Faustina. And if this was right in the lives of these men, of Plato and Newton and Marcus Aurelius, it is equally right in the life of every soul; for each has, in its sphere, the same obligations to self as the soul of the greatest. We should tell ourselves, once and for all, that

## Duty and Self-Sacrifice

it is the first duty of the soul to become as happy, complete, independent and great as lies in its power. Herein is no egoism, or pride. To become effectually generous and sincerely humble there must be within us a confident, tranquil and clear comprehension of all that we owe to ourselves. To this end we may sacrifice even the passion for sacrifice; for sacrifice never should be the means of ennoblement, but only the sign of our being ennobled.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

230. As a rule it is far easier to die morally, nay, even physically, for others, than to learn how best we should live for them. There are too many beings who thus lull to sleep all initiative, personal life, and absorb themselves wholly in the idea that they are prepared and ready for sacrifice.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

231. Let us beware lest we act as he did in the fable, who stood watch in the light-

## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

house, and gave to the poor in the cabins about him the oil of the mighty lanterns that served to illumine the sea. Every soul in its sphere has charge of a light-house, for which there is more or less need. The humblest mother who allows her whole life to be crushed, to be saddened, absorbed, by the less important of her motherly duties, is giving her oil to the poor; and her children will suffer, the whole of their life, from there not having been, in the soul of their mother, the radiance it might have acquired.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

**IX**  
**BEAUTY**





## IX

### BEAUTY

**I**T seems to me that a beautiful thought becomes more beautiful when others admire it. . . .—*Aglavaine and Selysette*.

233. It is always the soul which knows how to display itself that attracts us, but the one that hides is no less beautiful; nay it may well be more beautiful, by dint of its very unconsciousness. . . .—*Aglavaine and Selysette*.

234. There comes a moment in life when moral beauty seems more urgent, more penetrating, than intellectual beauty; when all that the mind has treasured must be bathed in the greatness of soul, lest it perish in the sandy desert, forlorn as a river that seeks in vain for the sea.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

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235. If at this moment you think or say something that is too beautiful to be true in you—if you have but endeavoured to think or say it to-day, on the morrow it will be true. We must try to be more beautiful than ourselves; we shall never distance our soul.—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

236. The assassin will tell you, 'I murder, it is true, but at least do I not steal.' And he who has stolen steals, but does not betray; and he who betrays would at least not betray his brother. And thus does each one cling for refuge to his last fragment of spiritual beauty. No man can have fallen so low but he still has a retreat in his soul, where he ever shall find a few drops of pure water, and be girt up anew with the strength that he needs to go on with his life.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

237. 'Even to the very wretchedest of all,' said to me one day the loftiest minded creature it has ever been my happiness to

## Beauty

know, 'even to the very wretchedest of all I never have the courage to say anything in reply that is ugly or mediocre.' I have for a long time followed that man's life, and have seen the inexplicable power he exercised over the most obscure, the most unapproachable, the blindest, even the most rebellious of souls. For no tongue can tell the power of a soul that strives to live in an atmosphere of beauty, and is actively beautiful in itself. And indeed is it not the quality of this activity that renders a life either miserable or divine?—*The Treasure of the Humble*.

238. We must never keep back a beautiful thought, for all the world is the happier for it. . . .—*Aglavaine and Selysette*.

239. The soul may well be no more than the most beautiful desire of our brain, and God Himself be only the most beautiful desire of our soul.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

240. Nothing of beauty dies without

## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

having purified something, nor can aught of beauty be lost. Let us not be afraid of sowing it along the road. It may remain there for weeks or years, but like the diamond it cannot dissolve, and finally there will pass by some one whom its glitter will attract; he will pick it up and go on his way, rejoicing. Then why keep back a lofty, beautiful word, because of your doubt whether others will understand?—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

241. Moral beauty, indeed, though it be of the rarest kind, never passes the comprehension of the most narrow-minded of men; and no act is so readily understood as the act that is truly sublime.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

242. There are about us thousands and thousands of poor creatures who have nothing of beauty in their lives: they come, they go, in obscurity, and we believe that all is dead within them; and no one pays

## Beauty

any heed. And then one day a simple word, an unexpected silence, a little tear that springs from the source of beauty itself, tells us that they have found the means of raising aloft, in the shadow of their soul, an ideal a thousand times more beautiful than the most beautiful things their ears have ever heard, or their eyes ever seen. Oh, noble and pallid ideals of silence and shadow! It is you, above all, who call forth the smile of the angels; it is you, above all, who soar direct to God!—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

243. There speaks to a very wise king one of five pensive maidens whom this king is invited to buy. 'Know thou, O King,' she says, 'that the most beautiful deed one can do is the deed that is disinterested. And so do they tell us that in Israel once were two brothers, and that one asked the other, "Of all the deeds thou hast done, which was the most wicked?"' And his brother

## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

replied, " This: as I passed by a hen-roost one day I stretched out my arm and seized a chicken and strangled it, and then flung it back into the roost. That is the wickedest deed of my life. And thou, O my brother, what is thy wickedest action? " And he answered, " That I prayed to Allah one day to demand a favour of him. For it is only when the soul is simply uplifted on high that prayer can be beautiful." '—*The Buried Temple*.

**X**  
**LOVE**





## X

### LOVE

**T**HE kingdom of love is, before all else, the great kingdom of certitude, for it is within its bounds that the soul is possessed of the utmost leisure.—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

245. Frequently, indeed, will the greatest suffering be caused by those whose love is greatest, for a strange, timid, tender cruelty is most often the anxious sister of love. On all sides does love search for the proofs of love, and the first proofs—who is not prone to discover them in the tears of the beloved?—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

246. Every thought that quickens my heart brings quickening, too, to the love and respect that I have for mankind. As I rise aloft, you will rise with me. But if, the

## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

better to love you, I deem it my duty to tear off the wings from my love, your love being wingless as yet; then shall I have added in vain to the plaints and the tears in the valley, but brought my own love thereby not one whit nearer the mountain. Our love should always be lodged on the highest peak we can attain. Let our love not spring from pity when it can be born of love; let us not forgive for charity's sake when justice offers forgiveness; nor let us try to console there where we can respect. Let our one never-ceasing care be to better the love that we offer our fellows. One cup of this love that is drawn from the spring on the mountain is worth a hundred taken from the stagnant well of ordinary charity—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

247. If you have loved profoundly you have needed no one to tell you that your soul was a thing as great in itself as the world; that the stars, the flowers, the waves

## Love

of night and sea were not solitary; that it was on the threshold of appearances that everything began, but nothing ended, and that the very lips you kissed belonged to a creature who was loftier, purer, and more beautiful than the one whom your arms enfolded.—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

248. At the root of the most marvellous love there never is more than the simplest felicity, an adoration, a tenderness within the understanding of all, a security, faith and fidelity all can acquire, an intensely human admiration, devotion—and all these the eager, unfortunate heart could know, too, in its sorrowful life, had it only a little less impatience and bitterness, a little more initiative and energy.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

249. There is not a man in the world but something improves in his soul from the moment he loves—and that though his love be but vulgar.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

250. The greatest advantage of love is that it gives us occasion to love and admire in one person, sole and unique, what we should have had neither knowledge nor strength to love and admire in the many.  
—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

251. All that is loyal within you will flower in the loyalty of the woman you love; whatever of truth there abides in your soul will be soothed by the truth that is hers; and her strength of character can only be enjoyed by that which is strong in you.  
—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

252. However imperfect you be, you still may suffice for the love of a marvellous being; but for your love, if you are not perfect, that being will never suffice.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

253. When Dante had gained the third sphere, and stood in the midst of the heavenly lights, all shining with uniform splendour, he saw that around him naught

## Love

moved, and wondered was he standing motionless there, or indeed drawing nearer unto the seat of God? So he cast his eyes upon Beatrice, and she seemed more beautiful to him; wherefore he knew that he was approaching his goal. And so can we too count the steps that we take on the highway of truth, by the increase of love that comes for all that goes with us in life; the increase of love and of glad curiosity, of respect and of deep admiration.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

254. When you love, it is not your love that forms part of your destiny; but the knowledge of self that you will have found, deep down in your love—this it is that will help to fashion your life.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

255. Not to all men is it given to be hero or genius, victorious, admirable always, or even to be simply happy in exterior things; but it lies in the power of the least

## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

favoured among us to be loyal, and gentle, and just, to be generous and brotherly; he that has least gifts of all can learn to look on his fellows without envy or hatred, without malice futile regret; the outcast can take his strange, silent part (which is not always that of least service) in the gladness of those who are near him; he that has barely a talent can still learn to forgive an offence with an ever nobler forgiveness, can find more excuses for error, more admiration for human word and deed; and the man there are none to love can love, and reverence love.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

256. There are certain fastnesses within our soul that lie buried so deep that love alone dare venture down; and it returns laden with undreamed-of jewels, whose lustre can only be seen as they pass from our open hand to the hand of one we love.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

257. It is sad to love and be unloved,

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but sadder still to be unable to love.—  
*Wisdom and Destiny.*

258. Love does not always reflect; often indeed does it need no reflection, no search into self, to enjoy what is best in thought; but, none the less, all that is best in love is closely akin to all that is best in thought.—  
*Wisdom and Destiny.*

259. Loyally to love a great error may well be more helpful than meanly to serve a great truth; for in doubt, no less than in faith, are passion and love to be found.—  
*Wisdom and Destiny.*

260. The extent of our love for the thing which we hold to be true is of greater importance than even the truth itself.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

261. If my soul, on awaking this morning, was cheered, as it dwelt on its love, by a thought that drew near to a God—a God, we have said, who is doubtless no more than the loveliest desire of our soul—then shall I



## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

behold this same thought astir in the beggar who passes my window the moment thereafter; and I shall love him the more for that I understand him the better.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

262. When a virtue of the being we love finds not, on the threshold of our heart, a virtue that resembles it somewhat, then is it all unaware to whom it shall offer the gladness it brings.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

263. To love madly, perhaps, is not wise; still, should you love madly, more wisdom will doubtless come to you than if you had always loved wisely.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

264. As for a thought, we know not, it may be deceptive; but the love, wherewith we have loved it, will surely return to our soul; nor can a single drop of its clearness or strength be abstracted by error.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

265. If the shafts of envy can wound

## Love

and draw blood, it is only because we ourselves have shafts that we wish to throw; if treachery can wring a groan from us, we must be disloyal ourselves. Only those weapons can wound the soul that it has not yet sacrificed on the altar of Love.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

266. When we lose one we love, our bitterest tears are called forth by the thought of the hours when our love had been all too slight. If we always had smiled on the one who is gone, there would be no despair in our grief; and some sweetness would cling to our tears, reminiscent of virtues and happiness.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

267. I have known more than one life that love broke asunder, but if it had not been love, these lives would no doubt have been broken no less by friendship or apathy, by doubt, hesitation, indifference, inaction. For that only which in itself is fragile can be rent in the heart by love; and where all

### Thoughts from Maeterlinck

is broken that the heart contains, then must all have been far too frail.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

268. In the most perfect love, the lovers' happiness will not be exactly the same, be their union never so close; for the better of the two needs must love with a love that is deeper; and the one who loves with a deeper love must be surely the happier.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

**XI**  
**WOMEN**



## XI

### WOMEN

**I**F, like Don Juan, we take a thousand and three to our embraces, still will we find, on that evening when arms fall asunder and lips disunite, that it is always the same woman, good or bad, tender or cruel, loving or faithless, that is standing before us.—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

270. The first time a man meets a woman, a single word or thought that denies the beautiful or profound will be enough to poison for ever *his existence* in her soul.—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

271. Let but my very loftiest thought be weighed in the scale of life or love, it will not turn the balance against the three little words that the maid who loves me shall have whispered of her silver bangles,

## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

her pearl necklace, or her trinkets of glass.

. . . —*The Treasure of the Humble.*

272. There is nothing that blends more readily than earth and sky; if your eyes have looked on the stars, before enfolding in your arms the woman you love, your embrace will not be the same as though you merely had looked at the walls of your room.—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

273. Do I need to be told whether she whom I take in my arms to-day is jealous or fickle, gay or sad, sincere or treacherous? Do you think that these wretched words can attain the heights whereon our souls repose and where our destiny fulfils itself in silence? What care I whether she speak of rain or jewels, of pins or feathers; what care I though she appear not to understand? Do you think that it is for a sublime word that I thirst when I feel that a soul is gazing into my soul?—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

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274. The woman never forgets the path that leads to the centre of her being; and no matter whether I find her in opulence or in poverty, in ignorance or in fulness of knowledge, in shame or in glory, let me but whisper one word that has truly come forth from the virgin depth of my soul, and she will retrace her footsteps along the mysterious paths that she has never forgotten, and without a moment's hesitation bring back to me, from out her inexhaustible stores of love, a word, a look, or a gesture, that shall be no less pure than my own. It is as though her soul were ever within call; for by day and night is she prepared to give answer to the loftiest appeal from another soul; and the ransom of the poorest is undistinguishable from the ransom of a queen.

. . .—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

275. Some of nature's strangest secrets are often revealed, at sacred moments, to these maidens who love, and ingenuously



## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

and unconsciously will they declare them. The sage follows in their footsteps to gather up the jewels, that in their innocence and joy they scatter along the path. The poet, who feels what they feel, offers homage to their love, and tries, in his songs, to transplant that love, which is the germ of the age of gold, to other times and other countries. For what has been said of the mystics applies above all to women, since it is they who have preserved the sense of the mystic in our earth to this day. . . .

—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

276. . . . Besides their primitive instincts all women have communications with the unknown that are denied to us.—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

277. We are told that a thousand centuries divide us from ourselves when we choose the woman we love, and that the first kiss of the betrothed is but the seal that thousands of hands, craving for birth,

## Women

impress upon the lips of the mother they desire.—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

278. May it not be during one of those profound moments, when his head is pillowed on a woman's breast, that the hero learns to know the strength and steadfastness of his star? And, indeed, will any true sentiment of the future ever come to the man who has not had his resting-place in a woman's heart?—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

279. Let not floating straws cause us to forget the prodigies of the gulf. The most glorious thoughts and the most degraded ideas can no more ruffle the eternal surface of our soul than, amidst the stars of heaven, Himalaya or precipice can alter the surface of the earth. A look, a kiss, and the certainty of a great invisible presence: all is said; and I know that she who is by my side is my equal. . . . But truly this equal is admirable, and strange; and, when

### Thoughts from Maeterlinck

love comes to her, even the lowest of wantons possesses that which we never have, inasmuch as, in her thoughts, love is always eternal.—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

280. It would seem that women are more largely swayed by destiny than ourselves. They submit to its decrees with far more simplicity; nor is there sincerity in the resistance they offer. They are still nearer to God, and yield themselves with less reserve to the pure workings of the mystery. And therefore is it, doubtless, that all the incidents in our life in which they take part seem to bring us nearer to what might almost be the very fountain-head of destiny.—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

281. It is well that old men should now and again touch with their lips a woman's forehead or the cheek of a child that belief in the freshness of life may once more return to them and its menace be hidden.—*Pélléas and Mélisande.*

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282. I would that all who have suffered at woman's hands, and found them evil, would loudly proclaim it, and give us their reasons; and if those reasons be well founded we shall be indeed surprised, and shall have advanced far forward in the mystery. For women are indeed the veiled sisters of all the great things that we do not see. They are indeed nearest of kin to the infinite that is about us, and they alone can still smile at it with the intimate grace of the child, to whom its father inspires no fear. It is they who preserve here below the pure fragrance of our soul, like some jewel from heaven, which none know how to use; and were they to depart, the spirit would reign in solitude in a desert. Theirs are still the divine emotions of the first days; and the sources of their being lie, deeper far than ours, in all that was illimitable. Those who complain of them know not the heights whereon the true kisses are found, and

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verily do I pity them. And yet, how insignificant do women seem when we look at them as we pass by! We see them moving about in their little homes; this one is bending forward, down there another is sobbing, a third sings, and the last sews; and there is not one of us who understands. . . .

We visit them, as one visits pleasant things; we approach them with caution and suspicion, and it is scarcely possible for the soul to enter. We question them mistrustfully—they, who know already, answer naught, and we go away, shrugging our shoulders, convinced that they do not understand. . . .—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

283. Some beings there are, of vigorous intellect, whose intellect never is used to discover a fault, or foster a feeling of charity. And this happens often with women. In cases where a man and a woman have equal intellectual power, the woman will always devote far less of this

## Women

power to acquiring moral self-knowledge.  
And truly the intellect that aims not at  
consciousness is but beating its wings in the  
void.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*



**XII**  
**THE PAST**





## XII

### THE PAST

**W**HATEVER was one day and has now ceased to be makes for sadness; above all, whatever was very happy and very beautiful.—*The Buried Temple.*

285. Our past had no other mission than to lift us to the moment at which we are, and there equip us with the needful experience and weapons, the needful thought and gladness. If, at this precise moment, it take from us and divert to itself one particle of our energy, then, however glorious it may have been, it still was useless, and had better never have been. If we allow it to arrest a gesture that we were about to make, then is our death beginning; and the edifices of the future will suddenly take the semblance of tombs.—*The Buried Temple.*

## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

286. No past, viewed by itself, can seem happy; and the privileged of fate, who reflect on what remains of the happy years that have flown, have perhaps more reason for sorrow than the unfortunate ones who brood over the dregs of a life of wretchedness.—*The Buried Temple.*

287. After a few acts of weakness, of treachery, of culpable self-indulgence, the survey of our past life can bring discouragement only, whereas we have great need that our past should inspire and sustain us. For therein alone do we truly know what we are; it is only our past that can come to us, in our moments of doubt, and say: 'Since you were able to do that thing, it shall lie in your power to do this thing also. When that danger confronted you, when that terrible grief laid you prostrate, you had faith in yourself and you conquered. The conditions to-day are the same; do you but preserve your faith in yourself, and your star

## The Past

will be constant.' But what reply shall we make if our past can only whisper: 'Your success has been solely due to injustice and falsehood, wherefore it behoves you once more to deceive and to lie.' No man cares to let his eyes rest on his acts of disloyalty, weakness, or treachery; and all the events of bygone days which we cannot contemplate calmly and peacefully, with satisfaction and confidence, trouble and restrict the horizon which the days that are not yet are forming far away.—*The Buried Temple*.

288. To have known how to change the past into a few saddened smiles—is this not to master the future?—*The Treasure of the Humble*.

289. Our past stretches behind us in long perspective. It slumbers in the distance like a deserted city shrouded in mist. A few peaks mark its boundary, and soar predominant into the air; a few important acts stand out like towers, some with the

## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

light still upon them, others half ruined, and slowly decaying beneath the weight of oblivion. The trees are bare, the walls crumble, and shadow slowly steals over all. Everything seems to be dead there, and rigid, save only when memory, slowly decomposing, lights it for an instant with an illusory gleam. But apart from this animation, derived only from our expiring recollections, all would appear to be definitely motionless, immutable forever; divided from present and future by a river that shall not again be crossed.

In reality it is alive; and, for many of us, endowed with a profounder, more ardent life than either present or future. In reality this dead city is often the hotbed of our existence; and in accordance with the spirit in which men return to it, shall some find all their wealth there, and others lose what they have.—*The Buried Temple*.

290. Better the ordinary past, content

## The Past

with the befitting place in the shadow, than the sumptuous past which claims to govern what has traveled out of its reach. Better a mediocre, but living present, which acts as though it were alone in the world, than a present which profoundly expires in the chains of a marvellous long ago. A single step that we take at this hour towards an uncertain goal, is far more important to us than the thousand leagues we covered in our march towards a dazzling triumph in the days that were.—*The Buried Temple*.

291. 'The past is past,' we say, and it is false: the past is always present. 'We have to bear the burden of our past,' we sigh, and it is false; the past bears our burden. 'Nothing can wipe out the past,' and it is false; the least effort of will sends present and future travelling over the past, to efface whatever we bid them efface. 'The indestructible, irreparable, immutable past,' and that is no truer than the rest. In

## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

those who speak thus it is the present that is immutable, and knows not how to repair.

‘My past is wicked, it is sorrowful, empty,’ we say again; ‘as I look back I can see no moment of beauty, of happiness or love; I see nothing but wretched ruins . . .’ and that is false; for you see precisely what you yourself place there at the moment your eyes rest upon it.—*The Buried Temple*.

292. No past can be empty or squalid, no events can be wretched; the wretchedness lies in our manner of welcoming them. And if it were true that nothing had happened to you, that would be the most remarkable adventure that any man ever had met with; and no less remarkable would be the light it would shed upon you.—*The Buried Temple*.

293. The past asserts itself only in those whose moral growth has ceased; then, and not till then, does it become redoubtable. From that moment we have indeed the irre-

## The Past

parable behind us, and the weight of what we have done lies heavy upon our shoulders. But so long as the life of our mind and character flows uninterruptedly on, so long will the past remain in suspense above us; and, as the glance may be that we send towards it, will it, complaisant as the clouds Hamlet showed to Polonius, adopt the shape of the hope or fear, the peace or disquiet, that we are perfecting within us.—*The Buried Temple.*

294. Our past is our secret, promulgated by the voice of years; it is the most mysterious image of our being, over which Time keeps watch. The image is not dead; a mere nothing degrades or adorns it; it can still grow bright or sombre, can still smile or weep, express love or hatred; and yet it remains recognisable for ever in the midst of the myriad images that surround it. It stands for what we once were, as our aspirations and hopes stand for what we shall



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be; and the two faces blend, that they may teach us what we are.—*The Buried Temple.*

295. Our chief concern with the past, that which truly remains and forms part of us, is not what we have done or the adventures we have met with, but the moral reactions bygone events are producing within us at this very moment, the inward being they have helped to form; and these reactions, that give birth to our sovereign, intimate being, are wholly governed by the manner in which we regard past events, and vary as the moral substance varies that they encounter within us. But with every step in advance that our feelings or intellect take, a change will come in this moral substance; and then, on the instant, the most immutable facts, that seemed to be graven for ever on the stone and bronze of the past, will assume an entirely different aspect, will return to life and leap into move-

## The Past

ment, bringing us vaster and more courageous counsels, dragging memory aloft with them in their ascent; and what was a mass of ruin, mouldering in the darkness, becomes a populous city whereon the sun once more shines.—*The Buried Temple.*

296. Above all, let us envy the past of no man. Our own was created by ourselves, and for ourselves alone. No other could have suited us, no other could have taught us the truth that it alone can teach, or given the strength that it alone can give. And whether it be good or bad, sombre or radiant, it still remains a collection of unique masterpieces the value of which is known to none but ourselves; and no foreign masterpiece could equal the action we have accomplished, the kiss we received, the thing of beauty that moved us so deeply, the suffering we underwent, the anguish that held us enchained, the love that

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wreathed us in smiles or in tears.—*The Buried Temple.*

297. He who should see, spread out before him, the past lives of a multitude of men, could not easily decide which past he himself would wish to have lived, were he not able at the same time to witness the moral results of these dissimilar and unsymmetrical facts. He might not impossibly make a fatal blunder; he might choose an existence overflowing with incomparable happiness and victory, that sparkle like wonderful jewels; while his glance might travel indifferently over a life that appeared to be empty, whereas it was truly steeped to the brim in serene emotions and lofty, redeeming thoughts, whereby, though the eye saw nothing, that life was yet rendered happy among all.—*The Buried Temple.*

298. More dangerous still than the past of happiness and glory is the one inhabited

## The Past

by overpowering and too dearly cherished phantoms. Many an existence perishes in the coils of a fond recollection. And yet, were the dead to return to this earth, they would say, I fancy, with the wisdom that must be theirs who have seen what the ephemeral light still hides from us: 'Dry your eyes. There comes to us no comfort from your tears; exhausting you, they exhaust us also. Detach yourself from us, banish us from your thoughts, until such time as you can think of us without strewing tears on the life we still live in you. We endure only in your recollection; but you err in believing that only your regrets can touch us. It is the things you do that prove to us we are not forgotten, and rejoice our manes; and this without your knowing it, without any necessity that you should turn towards us. Each time that our pale image saddens your ardour, we feel ourselves die anew, and it is a more

## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

perceptible, irrevocable death than was our other; bending too often over our tombs, you rob us of the life, the courage and love, that you imagine you restore.

‘It is in you that we are, it is in all your life that our life resides; and as you become greater, even while forgetting us, so do we become greater too, and our shades draw the deep breath of prisoners whose prison door is flung open.

‘If there be anything new we have learned in the world where we are now, it is, first of all, that the good we did to you when we were, like yourselves, on the earth, does not balance the evil wrought by a memory which saps the force and the confidence of life.’—*The Buried Temple*.

299. The force of the past is indeed one of the heaviest that weigh upon men and incline them to sadness. And yet there is none more docile, more eager to follow the direction we could so readily give did

## The Past

we but know how best to avail ourselves of this docility. In reality, if we think of it, the past belongs to us quite as much as the present, and is far more malleable than the future. Like the present, and to a much greater extent than the future, its existence is all in our thoughts, and our hand controls it; nor is this only true of our material past, wherein there are ruins that we perhaps can restore; it is true also of the regions that are closed to our tardy desire for atonement; it is true, above all, of our moral past, and of what we consider to be most irreparable there.—*The Buried Temple.*



**XIII**  
**THE FUTURE**





## XIII

### THE FUTURE

**T**IME is a mystery which we have arbitrarily divided into a past and a future, in order to try and understand something of it. In itself, it is almost certain that it is but an immense, eternal, motionless Present, in which all that takes place and all that will take place takes place immutably; in which To-morrow, save in the ephemeral mind of man, is indistinguishable from Yesterday or To-day.—‘*The Future*,’ *Essay published in Fortnightly Review*.

301. Space is more familiar to us, because the accidents of our organism place us more directly in relation with it and make it more concrete. We can move in it pretty freely, in a certain number of directions, before and behind us. That is

## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

why no traveller would take it into his head to maintain that the towns which he has not yet visited will become real only at the moment when he sets his foot within their walls. Yet this is very nearly what we do when we persuade ourselves that an event which has not yet happened does not yet exist.—*Ibid.*

302. It is in some respects quite incomprehensible that we should not know the future. Probably a mere nothing, the displacement of a cerebral lobe, the resetting of Broca's convolution in a different manner, the addition of a slender network of nerves to those which form our consciousness: any one of those would be enough to make the future unfold itself before us with the same clearness, the same majestic amplitude as that with which the past is displayed on the horizon, not only of our individual life, but also of the life of the species to which we belong.—*Ibid.*

## The Future

303. Realities are what will happen to us, having already happened in the history that overhangs our own, the motionless and superhuman history of the universe. Illusion is the opaque veil woven with the ephemeral threads called Yesterday, To-day, and To-morrow, which we embroider on those realities. But it is not indispensable that our existence should continue the eternal dupe of that illusion. We may even ask ourselves whether our extraordinary unfitness for knowing a thing so simple, so incontestable, so perfect and so necessary as the future, would not form one of the greatest subjects for astonishment to an inhabitant of another star who should visit us.—*Ibid.*

304. One would say that man had always the feeling that a mere infirmity of his mind separates him from the future. He knows it to be there, living, actual, perfect, behind a kind of wall, around

## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

which he has never ceased to turn since the first days of his coming on this earth. Or rather, he feels it within himself and known to a part of himself: only, that unfortunate and disquieting knowledge is unable to travel, through the too-narrow channels of his senses, to his consciousness, which is the only place where knowledge acquires a name, a useful strength, and, so to speak, the freedom of the human city.—*Ibid.*

**XIV**  
**THE SAGE**



## XIV

### THE SAGE

**T**HE greater our love may be, the greater the surface that we expose to majestic sorrow; wherefore none the less does the sage never cease his endeavours to enlarge this beautiful surface.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

306. The mere presence of the sage suffices to paralyse destiny.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

307. To some of us, moral infirmities are so many steps tending downwards; to others they represent steps that lead them on high. The wise man perchance may do things that are done by the unwise man also; but the latter is forced by his passions to become the abject slave of his instincts, whereas the sage's passions will end by



## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

illuminating much that was vague in his consciousness.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

308. "As for me," said a sage one day, "I have never come across a single woman who did not bring to me something that was great." He was great himself first of all; therein lay his secret.—*The Treasure of the Humble*.

309. Were the only son of Thersites and Socrates to die the same day, Socrates' grief would in no way resemble the grief of Thersites. Misfortune or happiness, it seems, must be chastened ere it knock at the door of the sage, but only by stooping low can it enter the commonplace soul.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

310. The true sage is not he who sees, but he who, seeing the furthest, has the deepest love for mankind. He who sees without loving is only straining his eyes in the darkness.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

## The Sage

311. We seem to imagine that the sage, whose terrible death is written in history, spent all his life in sad anticipation of the end his wisdom prepared; whereas in reality the thought of death troubles the wise far less than the wicked. Socrates had far less cause than Macbeth to dread an unhappy end. And unhappy as his death may have been, it at least had not darkened his life; he had not spent all his days in dying preliminary deaths, as did the Thane of Cawdor.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

312. It must surely be right to discard all happiness injurious to others, but happiness that injures others will not long wear the semblance of happiness in the eyes of the sage.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

313. When a man of inferior soul endeavours to estimate a great sage's happiness, this happiness flows through his fingers like water; yet is it heavy as gold in the hand of a brother sage. For to each

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is the happiness given that he can best understand.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

314. Had Jesus Christ or Socrates dwelt in Agamemnon's palace among the Atrides, then had there been no Oresteia; nor would Oedipus ever have dreamed of destroying his sight if they had been tranquilly seated on the threshold of Jocasta's abode. Fatality shrinks back abashed from the soul that has more than once conquered her; there are certain disasters she dare not send forth when this soul is near; and the sage, as he passes by, intervenes in numberless tragedies.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

**XV**  
**THE LIFE OF THE BEE**



## XV

### THE LIFE OF THE BEE

**I** HAVE not yet forgotten the first apiary I saw, when I learned to love the bees. It was many years ago in a large village of Dutch Flanders, the sweet and pleasant country whose love for brilliant colour rivals that of Zealand even, the concave mirror of Holland; a country that gladly spreads out before us, as so many pretty, thoughtful toys, her illuminated gables and waggons and towers; her cupboards and clocks that gleam at the end of the passage; her little trees marshalled along quays and canal-banks, waiting, one almost might think, for some quiet, beneficent ceremony; her boats and her barges with sculptured poops, her flower-like doors and windows, immaculate dams, and elaborate, many-coloured draw-bridges; and her

## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

little varnished houses, bright as new pottery, from which bell-shaped dames come forth, all a-glitter with silver and gold, to milk the cows in the white-hedged fields, or spread the linen on flowery lawns, cut into patterns of oval lozenge, and most astoundingly green.

To this spot, where life would seem more restricted than elsewhere—if it be possible for life indeed to become restricted—a sort of aged philosopher had retired, an old man somewhat akin to Virgil's—

‘Man equal to kings, and approaching the gods;’  
whereto Lafontaine might have added—

‘And, like the gods, content and at rest.’

Here had he built his refuge, being a little weary: not disgusted, for the large aversions are unknown to the sage, but a little weary of interrogating men, whose answers to the only interesting questions one can put concerning nature and her veritable

## The Life of the Bee

laws are far less simple than those that are given by animals and plants. His happiness, like the Scythian philosopher's, lay all in the beauties of his garden; and best-loved and visited most often, was the apiary, composed of twelve domes of straw, some of which he had painted a bright pink, and some a pale yellow, but most of all a tender blue, having noticed, long before Sir John Lubbock's demonstrations, the bees' fondness for this colour. These hives stood against the wall of the house, in the angle formed by one of those pleasant and graceful Dutch kitchens whose earthenware dresser, all bright with copper and tin, reflected itself through the open door on to the peaceful canal. And the water, burdened with these familiar images beneath its curtain of poplars, led one's eye to a calm horizon of mills and of meadow.

—*The Life of the Bee.*

316. We might be in one of the castles



## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

of German legend, whose walls are composed of myriad phials containing the souls of men about to be born. For we are in the abode of life that goes before life. On all sides, asleep in their closely-sealed cradles, in this infinite superposition of marvellous six-sided cells, lie thousands of nymphs, whiter than milk, who with folded arms and head bent forward await the hour of awakening. In their uniform tombs that, isolated, become nearly transparent, they seem almost like hoary gnomes lost in deep thought, or legends of virgins whom the folds of the shroud have contorted, who are buried in hexagonal prisms that some inflexible geometrician has multiplied to the verge of delirium.

Over the entire area that the vertical walls enclose, and in the midst of this growing world that so soon shall transform itself, that shall four or five times in succession assume fresh vestments, and then spin

## The Life of the Bee

its own winding-sheet in the shadow, hundreds of workers are dancing and flapping their wings. They appear thus to generate the necessary heat, and accomplish some other object besides that is still more obscure; for this dance of theirs contains some extraordinary movements, so methodically conceived, that they must infallibly answer some purpose which no observer has yet, I believe, been able to divine.

A few days more, and the lids of these myriad urns—whereof a considerable hive will contain from sixty to eighty thousand—will break, and two large and earnest black eyes will appear, surmounted by antennæ that already are groping at life, while active jaws are busily engaged in enlarging the opening from within. The nurses at once come running; they help the young bee to emerge from her prison, they clean her and brush her, and at the tip of their tongue they present the first honey of

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the new life. But the bee that has come from another world is bewildered still, trembling and pale; she wears the feeble look of a little old man who might have escaped from his tomb, or perhaps of a traveller strewn with the powdery dust of the ways that lead unto life. She is perfect, however, from head to foot; she knows at once all that has to be known; and, like the children of the people, who learn, as it were, at their birth, that for them there shall never be time to play or to laugh, she instantly makes her way to the cells that are closed, and proceeds to beat her wings and to dance in cadence, so that she in her turn may quicken her buried sisters.—*The Life of the Bee.*

317. The bees give their honey and sweet-smelling wax to the man who attends them; but more precious gift still is their summoning him to the gladness of June, to the joy of the beautiful months; for

## The Life of the Bee

events in which bees take part happen only when skies are pure, at the winsome hours of the year when flowers keep holiday. They are the soul of the summer, the clock whose dial records the moments of plenty; they are the untiring wing on which delicate perfumes float, the guide of the quivering light-ray, the song of the slumberous, languid air; and their flight is the token, the sure and melodious note, of all the myriad fragile joys that are born in the heat and dwell in the sunshine. They teach us to tune our ear to the softest, most intimate whisper of these good, natural hours. To him who has known them and loved them, a summer where there are no bees becomes as sad and empty as one without flowers or birds.—*The Life of the Bee.*

318. It may be that our own spiral light, no less than that of the bees, has been kindled for no other purpose than that of amusing the darkness. So, too, is it possi-

## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

ble that some stupendous incident may suddenly surge from without, from another world, from a new phenomenon, and either inform this effort with definite meaning or definitively destroy it. But we must proceed on our way as though nothing abnormal could ever befall us. Did we know that to-morrow some revelation—a message, for instance, from a more ancient, more luminous planet than ours—were to root up our nature, to suppress the laws, the passions, and radical truths of our being, our wisest plan still would be to devote the whole of to-day to the study of these passions, these laws, and these truths, which must blend and accord in our mind; and to remain faithful to the destiny imposed on us, which is to subdue and to some extent raise within and around us the obscure forces of life. None of these, perhaps, will survive the new revelation; but the soul of those who shall up to the end

## The Life of the Bee

have fulfilled the mission that is pre-eminently the mission of man, must inevitably be in the front rank of all to welcome this revelation; and should they learn therefrom that indifference, or resignation to the unknown, is the veritable duty, they will be better equipped than the others for the comprehension of this final resignation and indifference, better able to turn these to account.—*The Life of the Bee.*

319. The bee is above all, and even to a greater extent than the ant, a creature of the crowd. She can only live in the midst of a multitude. When she leaves the hive, which is so densely packed that she has to force her way with blows of her head through the living walls that enclose her, she departs from her element. She will dive for an instant into flower-filled space as the swimmer will dive into the sea that is filed with pearls, but under pain of death it behoves her at regular intervals to return

## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

and breathe the crowd, as the swimmer must return and breathe the air.—*The Life of the Bee.*

320. The god of the bees is the future. When we, in our study of human history, endeavour to gauge the moral force or greatness of a people or race, we have one standard of measurement only—the dignity and permanence of their ideal, and the abnegation wherewith they pursue it. Have we often encountered an ideal more conformable to the desires of the universe, more widely manifest, more disinterested and sublime; have we often discovered an abnegation more complete and heroic?—*The Life of the Bee.*

321. For the sake of the future, each one renounces more than half of her rights and her joys. The queen bids farewell to freedom, the light of day, and the calyx of flowers; the workers give five or six years of their life, and shall never know love or

## The Life of the Bee

the joys of maternity. The queen's brain turns to pulp, that the reproductive organs may profit; in the workers these organs atrophy, to the benefit of their intelligence.—

*The Life of the Bee.*

322. Can we so readily divine the thoughts that may govern the two or three people whom we may chance to see moving and talking behind a closed window when their words do not reach us? Or let us suppose that an inhabitant of Venus or Mars were to contemplate us from the height of a mountain, and watch the little black specks that we form in space as we come and go in the streets and squares of our towns. Would the mere sight of our movements, our buildings, machines, and canals convey to him any precise idea of our morality, intellect, our manner of thinking and loving and hoping—in a word, of our real and intimate self? All he could do, like ourselves as we gaze at the hive, would be



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to take note of some facts that seem very surprising; and from these facts to deduce conclusions probably no less erroneous, no less uncertain, than those that we choose to form concerning the bee.—*The Life of the Bee*.

323. Day after day, at the hour of sunrise, the explorers of the dawn return, and the hive awakes to receive the good news of the earth. 'The lime-trees are blossoming to-day on the banks of the canal.' 'The grass by the roadside is gay with white clover.' 'The sage and the lotus are about to open.' 'The mignonette, the lilies, are overflowing with pollen.' Whereupon the bees must organise quickly and arrange to divide the work. Five thousand of the sturdiest will sally forth to the lime-trees, while three thousand juniors go and refresh the white clover. Those who yesterday were absorbing nectar from the corollas will to-day repose their tongue and

## The Life of the Bee

the glands of their sac, and gather red pollen from the mignonette or yellow pollen from the tall lilies; for never shall you see a bee collecting or mixing pollen of a different colour or species, and indeed one of the chief preoccupations of the hive is the methodical bestowal of these pollens in the store-rooms, in strict accordance with their origin and colour. Thus does the hidden genius issue its commands. The workers immediately sally forth in long black files, whereof each one will fly straight to its allotted task. "The bees," says de Layens, "would seem to be perfectly informed as to the locality, the relative melliferous value, and the distance, of every melliferous plant within a certain radius from the hive."—*The Life of the Bee*.

324. Our hive, then, is preparing to swarm; making ready for the great immolation to the exacting god of the race. In obedience to the order of the spirit—an

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order that to us may well seem incomprehensible, for it is entirely opposed to all our own instincts and feelings—60,000 or 70,000 bees out of the 80,000 or 90,000 that form the whole population, will abandon the maternal city at the prescribed hour. They will not leave at a moment of despair, or desert with sudden or wild resolve a home laid waste by famine, disease, or war. No; the exile has long been planned, and the favourable hour patiently awaited. Were the hive poor, had it suffered from pillage or storm, had misfortune befallen the royal family, the bees would not forsake it. They leave it only when it has attained the apogee of its prosperity; at a time when, after the arduous labours of the spring, the immense palace of wax has its 120,000 well-arranged cells overflowing with new honey, and with the many-coloured flour known as "bees' bread," on which nymphs and larvæ are fed.

## The Life of the Bee

Never is the hive more beautiful than on the eve of its heroic renunciation, in its unrivalled hour of fullest abundance and joy; serene, for all its apparent excitement and feverishness. Let us endeavour to picture it to ourselves—not as it appears to the bees, for we cannot tell in what magical, formidable fashion things may be reflected in the 6000 or 7000 facets of their lateral eyes and the triple cyclopean eye on their brow—but as it would seem to us were we of their stature.

From the height of a dome more colossal than that of St. Peter's at Rome, waxen walls descend to the ground, balanced in the void and the darkness; gigantic and manifold, vertical and parallel geometric constructions, to which, for relative precision, audacity, and vastness, no human structure is comparable. Each of these walls, whose substance still is immaculate and fragrant, of virginal, silvery freshness, con-

## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

tains thousands of cells stored with provisions sufficient to feed the whole people for several weeks. Here, lodged in transparent cells, are the pollens, love-ferment of every flower of spring, making brilliant splashes of red and yellow, of black and mauve. Close by, sealed with a seal to be broken only in days of supreme distress, the honey of April is stored, most limpid and perfumed of all, in twenty thousand reservoirs that form a long and magnificent embroidery of gold, whose borders hang stiff and rigid. Still lower the honey of May matures, in great open vats by whose side watchful cohorts maintain an incessant current of air. In the centre, and far from the light whose diamond rays steal in through the only opening, in the warmest part of the hive, stands the abode of the future; here does it sleep, and wake. For this is the royal domain of the brood-cells, set apart for the queen and her acolytes;

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about 10,000 cells wherein the eggs repose, 15,000 or 16,000 chambers tenanted by larvæ, 40,000 dwellings inhabited by white nymphs to whom thousands of nurses minister. And finally, in the holy of holies of these parts, are the three, four, six, or twelve sealed palaces, vast in size compared with the others, where the adolescent princesses lie who await their hour, wrapped in a kind of shroud, all of them motionless and pale, and fed in the darkness.—*The Life of the Bee.*

325. In the hive the swarming bees have begun to lose patience, the hive whose black and vibrating waves are bubbling and overflowing, like a brazen cup beneath an ardent sun. It is noon, and the heat so great that the assembled trees would seem almost to hold back their leaves, as a man holds his breath before something very tender but very grave.—*The Life of the Bee.*

326. At the moment the signal is given,

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it is as though one sudden mad impulse had simultaneously flung open wide every single gate in the city; and the black throng issues, or rather pours forth, in a double, or treble, or quadruple jet, as the number of exits may be—in a tense, direct, vibrating, uninterrupted stream that at once dissolves and melts into space, where the myriad transparent furious wings weave a tissue throbbing with sound. And this for some moments will quiver right over the hive, with prodigious rustle of gossamer silks that countless electrified hands might be ceaselessly rending and stitching; it floats undulating, it trembles and flutters, like a veil of gladness invisible fingers support in the sky, and wave to and fro, from the flowers to the blue, expecting sublime advent or departure. And at last one angle declines, another is lifted; the radiant mantle unites its four sunlit corners; and, like the wonderful carpet the fairy-tale speaks of, that flits

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across space to obey its master's command, it steers its straight course, bending forward a little, as though to hide in its folds the sacred presence of the future, towards the willow, the pear-tree, or lime whereon the queen has alighted; and round her each rhythmical wave comes to rest, as though on a nail of gold, and suspends its fabric of pearls and of luminous wings.

And then there is silence once more; and, in an instant, this mighty tumult, this awful curtain apparently laden with unspeakable menace and anger, this bewildering golden hail that streamed upon every object near—all these become merely a great inoffensive, peaceful cluster of bees, composed of thousands of little motionless groups, that patiently wait, as they hang from the branch of a tree, for the scouts to return who have gone in search of a place of shelter.—*The Life of the Bee.*

327. It comes to pass with the bees as



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with most of the things in this world; we remark some few of their habits: we say, they do this, they work in such and such fashion, their queens are born thus, their workers are virgin, they all swarm at a certain time. And then we imagine we know them, and ask nothing more. We watch them hasten from flower to flower, we see the constant agitation within the hive; their life seems very simple to us, and bounded, like every life, by the instinctive cares of reproduction and nourishment. But let the eye draw near, and endeavour to see; and at once the least phenomenon of all becomes overpoweringly complex; we are confronted by the enigma of intellect, of destiny, will, aim, means, causes; by the incomprehensible organisation of the most insignificant act of life.—*The Life of the Bee.*

328. But what have we to do, some will ask, with the intelligence of the bees? What concern is it of ours whether this be

## The Life of the Bee

a little less or a little more? Why weigh, with such infinite care, a minute fragment of almost invisible matter, as though it were a fluid whereon depended the destiny of man? I hold, and exaggerate nothing, that our interest herein is of the most considerable. The discovery of a sign of true intellect outside ourselves procures us something of the emotion Robinson Crusoe felt when he saw the imprint of a human foot on the sandy beach of his island. We seem to be less solitary than we had believed.—

*The Life of the Bee.*

329. It must not be inferred that the hive reveals no faults. There is one masterpiece, the hexagonal cell, that touches absolute perfection; a perfection that all the geniuses in the world, were they to meet in conclave, could in no way enhance. No living creature, not even man, has achieved in the centre of his sphere, what the bee has achieved in her own; and were some one

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from another world to descend and ask of the earth the most perfect creation of the logic of life, we should needs have to offer the humble comb of honey.—*The Life of the Bee.*

330. Some little time back I conducted a friend to one of my hives of glass, and showed him the movements of his wheel, as readily perceptible as the great wheel of a clock—showed him, in all its bareness, the universal agitation on every comb, the perpetual, frantic, bewildered haste of the nurses around the brood-cells; the living gangways and ladders formed by the makers of wax; the abounding, unceasing activity of the entire population, and their pitiless, useless effort; the ardent, feverish coming and going of all; the general absence of sleep save in the cradles alone, around which continuous labour kept watch; the denial of even the repose of death in a home which permits no illness

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and accords no grave; and my friend, his astonishment over, soon turned his eyes away, and in them I could read the signs of I know not what saddened fear.

And truly, underlying the gladness that we note first of all in the hive; underlying the dazzling memories of beautiful days, that render it the storehouse of summer's most precious jewels; underlying the blissful journeys that knit it so close to the flowers and to running water, to the sky, to the peaceful abundance of all that makes for beauty and happiness—underlying all these exterior joys there reposes a sadness as deep as the eye of man can behold. And we, who dimly gaze on these things with our own blind eyes, we know full well that it is not they alone whom we cannot understand, but that before us there lies a pitiable form of the great power that quickens us all.

Sad let it be, as all things in nature are

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sad, when our eyes rest too closely upon them. And thus it ever shall be so long as we know not her secret, or even whether secret truly there be. And should we discover some day that there is no secret, or that the secret is monstrous, other duties will then arise that as yet, perhaps, have no name. Let our heart, if it will, in the meantime repeat "It is sad;" but let our reason be content to add, "Thus it is."—*The Life of the Bee.*

331. It will happen at times that two queens will be hatched simultaneously, the occurrence being rare, however, for the bees take special care to prevent it. But whenever this does take place, the deadly combat will begin the moment they emerge from their cradles; and of this combat Huber was the first to remark an extraordinary feature. Each time, it would seem, that the queens, in their passes, present their chitinous cuirasses to each other in

## The Life of the Bee

such a fashion that the drawing of the sting would prove mutually fatal, one might almost believe that, even as a god or a goddess was wont to interpose in the combats of the Iliad, so a god or a goddess, the divinity of the race perhaps, interposes here; and the two warriors, stricken with simultaneous terror, divide and fly, to meet shortly after and separate again should the double disaster once more menace the future of their people; till at last one of them shall succeed in surprising her clumsier, or less wary rival, and in killing her without risk to herself. For the law of the race has called for one sacrifice only.—*The Life of the Bee.*

332. The habits, the passions that we regard as inherent in the bee, will all be lacking in the queen. She will not crave for air, or the light of the sun; she will die without even once having tasted a flower. Her existence will pass in the shadow, in

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the midst of a restless throng, her sole occupation the indefatigable search for cradles that she must fill. On the other hand, she alone will know the disquiet of love. Not even twice, it may be, in her life shall she look on the light—for the departure of the swarm is by no means inevitable; on one occasion only, perhaps, will she make use of her wings, but then it will be to fly to her lover. It is strange to see so many things—organs, ideas, desires, habits, an entire destiny—depending, not on a germ, which were the ordinary miracle of the plant, the animal, and man, but on a curious inert substance: a drop of honey.—*The Life of the Bee.*

333. No bee, it would seem, dare take on itself the horror of direct and bloody regicide. Whenever, therefore, the good order and prosperity of the republic appear to demand that a queen shall die, they endeavour to give to her death some sem-

## The Life of the Bee

blance of natural disease, and by infinite subdivision of the crime, to render it almost anonymous. They will therefore, to use the picturesque expression of the apiarist, 'ball' the queenly intruder; in other words, they will entirely surround her with their innumerable interlaced bodies. They will thus form a sort of living prison wherein the captive is unable to move; and in this prison they will keep her for twenty-four hours, if need be, till the victim die of suffocation or hunger.—*The Life of the Bee.*

334. Around the virgin queen, and dwelling with her in the hive, are hundreds of exuberant males, for ever drunk on honey; the sole reason for their existence being one act of love. But, notwithstanding the incessant contact of two desires that elsewhere invariably triumph over every obstacle, the union never takes place in the hive, nor has it been possible to bring about the impregnation of a captive queen. While



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she lives in their midst the lovers about her know not what she is. They seek her in space, in the remote depths of the horizon, never suspecting that they have but this moment quitted her, have shared the same comb with her, have brushed against her, perhaps, in the eagerness of their departure. One might almost believe that those wonderful eyes of theirs, which cover their head as though with a glittering helmet, do not recognise or desire her save when she soars in the blue. Each day, from noon till three, when the sun shines resplendent, this plumed horde sallies forth in search of the bride, who is indeed more royal, more difficult of conquest than the most inaccessible princess of fairy legend; for twenty or thirty tribes will hasten from all the neighbouring cities, her court thus consisting of more than ten thousand suitors; and from these ten thousand one alone will be chosen, for the unique kiss of an instant that shall

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wed him to death no less than to happiness; while the others will fly helplessly round the intertwined pair, and soon will perish without ever again beholding this prodigious and fatal apparition.—*The Life of the Bee.*

335. Marvellous nuptials these, the most fairy-like that can be conceived, azure and tragic, raised high above life by the impetus of desire; imperishable and terrible, unique and bewildering, solitary and infinite. An admirable ecstasy, wherein death, supervening in all that our sphere has of most limpid and loveliest, in virginal, limitless space, stamps the instant of happiness on the sublime transparence of the great sky; purifying in that immaculate light the something of wretchedness that always hovers around love, rendering the kiss one that can never be forgotten; and, content this time with moderate tithe, proceeding herself, with hands that are almost maternal,

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to introduce and unite, in one body, for a long and inseparable future, two little fragile lives.—*The Life of the Bee.*

336. The queen starts her flight backwards, returns twice or thrice to the alighting-board, and then, having definitely fixed in her mind the exact situation and aspect of the kingdom she has never yet seen from without, she departs like an arrow to the zenith of the blue. She soars to a height, a luminous zone, that other bees attain at no period of their life. Far away, caressing their idleness in the midst of the flowers, the males have beheld the apparition, have breathed the magnetic perfume that spreads from group to group, till every apiary near is instinct with it. Immediately crowds collect and follow her into the sea of gladness, whose limpid boundaries ever recede. She, drunk with her wings, obeying the magnificent law of the race that chooses her lover, and enacts that the

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strongest alone shall attain her in the solitude of the ether, she rises still; and, for the first time in her life, the blue morning air rushes into her stigmata, singing its song, like the blood of heaven, in the myriad tubes of the tracheal sacs, nourished on space, that fill the centre of her body. She rises still. A region must be found unhaunted by birds, that else might profane the mystery. She rises still; and already the ill-assorted troop below are dwindling and falling asunder. The feeble, infirm, the aged, unwelcome, ill fed, who have flown from inactive or impoverished cities—these renounce the pursuit and disappear in the void. Only a small, indefatigable cluster remain, suspended in infinite opal. She summons her wings for one final effort; and now the chosen of incomprehensible forces has reached her, has seized her, and, bounding aloft with united impetus, the ascending spiral of their intertwined flight

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whirls for one second in the hostile madness of love.—*The Life of the Bee.*

337. The great idle drones, asleep in unconscious groups on the melliferous walls, are rudely torn from their slumbers by an army of wrathful virgins. They wake, in pious wonder; they cannot believe their eyes; and their astonishment struggles through their sloth as a moonbeam through marshy water. They stare amazedly round them, convinced that they must be victims of some mistake; and the mother-idea of their life being first to assert itself in their dull brain, they take a step towards the vats of honey to seek comfort there. But ended for them are the days of May honey, the wine-flower or lime-trees, and fragrant ambrosia of thyme and sage, or marjoram and white clover. Where the path once lay open to the kindly, abundant reservoirs, that so invitingly offered their waxen and sugary mouths, there stands now a burning-

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bush all alive with poisonous, bristling stings. The atmosphere of the city is changed; in lieu of the friendly perfume of honey the acrid odour of poison prevails; thousands of tiny drops glisten at the end of the stings, and diffuse rancour and hatred. Before the bewildered parasites are able to realise that the happy laws of the city have crumbled, dragging down in most inconceivable fashion their own plentiful destiny, each one is assailed by three or four envoys of justice; and these vigorously proceed to cut off his wings, saw through the petiole that connects the abdomen with the thorax, amputate the feverish antennæ, and seek an opening between the rings of his cuirass through which to pass their sword. No defence is attempted by the enormous, but unarmed creatures; they try to escape, or oppose their mere bulk to the blows that rain down upon them. Forced on to their back, with their relentless ene-

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mies clinging doggedly to them, they will use their powerful claws to shift them from side to side; or, turning on themselves, they will drag the whole group round and round in wild circles, which exhaustion soon brings to an end. And, in a very brief space, their appearance becomes so deplorable, that pity, never far from justice in the depths of our heart, quickly returns, and would seek forgiveness, though vainly, of the stern workers who recognise only Nature's harsh and profound laws. The wings of the wretched creatures are torn, their antennæ bitten, the segments of their legs wrenched off; and their magnificent eyes, mirrors once of the exuberant flowers, flashing back the blue light and the innocent pride of summer, now, softened by suffering, reflect only the anguish and distress of their end. Some succumb to their wounds, and are at once borne away to distant cemeteries by two or three of their executioners. Others, whose

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injuries are less, succeed in sheltering themselves in some corner, where they lie, all huddled together, surrounded by an inexorable guard, until they perish of want. Many will reach the door and escape into space, dragging their adversaries with them; but, towards evening, impelled by hunger and cold, they return in crowds to the entrance of the hive to beg for shelter. But there they encounter another pitiless guard. The next morning, before setting forth on their journey, the workers will clear the threshold, strewn with the corpses of the useless giants; and all recollections of the idle race disappear till the following spring.—*The Life of the Bee.*

338. Let not the possibility of general annihilation blur our perception of the task before us; above all, let us not count on the miraculous aid of chance. Hitherto, the promises of our imagination notwithstanding, we have always been left to ourselves,



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to our own resources. It is to our humblest efforts that every useful, enduring achievement of this earth is due. It is open to us, if we choose, to await the better or worse that may follow some alien accident, but on condition that such expectation hinder not our human task. Here again do the bees, as Nature always, provide a most excellent lesson. In the hive there has truly been prodigious intervention. The bees are in the hands of a power capable of annihilating or modifying their race, of transforming their destinies; the bees' thralldom is far more definite than our own. Therefore none the less do they perform their profound and primitive duty. And, among them, it is precisely those whose obedience to duty is most complete who are able to profit most fully to-day by the supernatural intervention that has raised the destiny of their species. And, indeed, to discover the unconquerable duty of a being is less diffi-

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cult than one imagines. It is ever to be read in the distinguishing organs, whereto the others are all subordinate. And just as it is written in the tongue, the stomach, and mouth of the bee that it must make honey, so is it written in our eyes, our ears, our nerves, our marrow, in every lobe of our head, in the whole nervous system of our body, that we have been created in order to transform all that we absorb of the things of earth into a particular energy, of a quality unique on this globe. I know of no other creature that has thus been fashioned to produce this strange fluid, which we call thought, intelligence, understanding, reason, soul, spirit, cerebral power, virtue, goodness, justice, knowledge; for it has a thousand names, though only one essence. To this essence all things within us are sacrificed. Our muscles, our health, the agility of our limbs, the equilibrium or our animal functions, the tranquillity of our life

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—all these feel the ever-increasing weight of its preponderance. It is the most precious, most difficult state to which matter can be raised. Flame, heat, light, even life, and the instinct more subtle than life, and most of the intangible forces which crowned the world before our coming, have paled at the contact of the new influence. Whither it will lead us we know not, or what it will do with us, or become in our hands. All this will be revealed when at last it shall reign in the plenitude of its powers. In the meanwhile, let our one care be to give to it all that it asks of us, to sacrifice for it whatever might retard its development. This, at the moment, without doubt is our first and our clearest duty. And from it we shall learn the others. It will feed them, extend them, in accordance as itself is fed, just as the waters of the valley, in accordance with the mysterious aliment they receive from the mountain-

## The Life of the Bee

peak. Let us not vex ourselves with asking who it is shall benefit by the force that is thus accumulating at our expense. The bees know not whether they will eat the honey they harvest, as we know not who will profit by the spiritual substance we introduce into the universe. As they go from flower to flower collecting more honey than themselves and their offspring can need, let us go from reality to reality seeking food for the incomprehensible flame, and, certain of having fulfilled our organic duty, prepare ourselves thus for whatever befall. Let us nourish this flame on our feelings and passions, on all that we see and think, that we hear and touch, on its own essence, which is the idea it derives from the discoveries, experience, and observation that result from its every movement. A time will then come when all things will turn so naturally to good in a spirit that has given itself to the loyal desire of this simple, hu-

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man duty, that the very suspicion of the possible aimlessness of its exhausting effort will only render the duty the clearer; will only add more purity, power, disinterestedness, and freedom to the ardour with which it still seeks.—*The Life of the Bee.*

**XVI**  
**LITERATURE**



## XVI

### LITERATURE

**I** HAVE at this moment before me the history of a mighty and passionate soul, whom every adventure that makes for the sorrow or gladness of man would seem to have passed by with averted head. It is of Emily Brontë I speak, than whom the first fifty years of the last century produced no woman of more incontestable genius.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

340. Viewed from without, what life could be more dreary and colourless, more futile and icily cold, than that of Emily Brontë? But where shall we take our stand, when we pass such a life in review, so as best to discover its truth, to judge it, approve it, and love it? How different it all appears as we leave the little parsonage, hidden away on the moors, and let our eyes



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rest on the soul of our heroine! It is rare indeed that we thus can follow the life of a soul in a body that knew no adventure; but it is less rare than might be imagined that a soul should have life of its own, which hardly depends, if at all, on incident of week or of year. In 'Wuthering Heights'—wherein this soul gives to the world its passions, desires, reflections, realisations, ideals, which is, in a word, its real history—in 'Wuthering Heights' there is more adventure, more passion, more energy, more ardour, more love, than is needed to give life or fulfilment to twenty heroic existences, twenty destinies of gladness or sorrow. Not a single event ever paused as it passed by her threshold; yet did every event she could claim take place in her heart, with incomparable force and beauty, with matchless precision and detail. We say that nothing ever happened; but did not all things really happen

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to her much more directly and tangibly than unto most of us, seeing that everything that took place about her, everything that she saw or heard, was transformed within her into thoughts and feelings, into indulgent love, admiration, adoration of life!—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

341. We feel that one must have lived for thirty years beneath burning chains of burning kisses to learn what she has learned; to dare so confidently to set forth, with such minuteness, such unerring certainty, the delirium of those two predestined lovers of 'Wuthering Heights'; to mark the self-conflicting movements of the tenderness that would make suffer and the cruelty that would make glad, the felicity that prayed for death and the despair that clung to life; the repulsion that desired, the desire drunk with repulsion—love surcharged with hatred, hatred staggering beneath its load of love. . . .—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

342. One may affirm that a poem draws the nearer to beauty and loftier truth in the measure that it eliminates words that merely explain the action, and substitutes for them others that reveal, not the so-called 'soul-state,' but I know not what intangible and unceasing striving of the soul towards its own beauty and truth.—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

343. The destiny of man is as subject to unknown forces to-day as it was in the days of old; and though it be true that some of these forces have vanished, others have arisen in their stead. The number of those that are really all-powerful has in no way diminished. Many attempts have been made, and in countless fashions, to explain the action of these forces and account for their intervention; and one might almost believe that the poets, aware of the futility of those explanations in face of a reality which, all things notwithstanding, is ever

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revealing more and more of itself, have fallen back on fatality as in some measure representing the inexplicable, or at least the sadness of the inexplicable. This is all that we find in Ibsen, the Russian novels, the highest class of modern fiction, Flaubert, &c. (see *War and Peace*, for instance, *L'Education Sentimentale*, and many others).—*The Buried Temple*.

344. There is not an existence about us but at first seems colourless, dreary, lethargic: what can our soul have in common with that of an elderly spinster, a slow-witted ploughman, a miser who worships his gold? Can any connection exist between such as these and a deep-rooted feeling, a boundless love for humanity, an interest time cannot stale? But let a Balzac step forward and stand in the midst of them, with his eyes and ears on the watch; and the emotion that lived and died in an old-fashioned country parlour shall as

## Thoughts from Maeterlinck

mightily stir our heart, shall as unerringly find its way to the deepest sources of life, as the majestic passion that ruled the life of a king and shed its triumphant lustre from the dazzling height of a throne.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

**XVII**  
**D R A M A**



## XVII

### D R A M A

**I** ADMIRE Othello, but he does not appear to me to live the august daily life of a Hamlet, who has the time to live, inasmuch as he does not act. Othello is admirably jealous. But is it not perhaps an ancient error to imagine that it is at the moment when this passion or another of equal violence possesses us, that we live our truest lives? I have grown to believe that an old man, seated in his armchair, waiting patiently, with his lamp beside him; giving unconscious ear to all the eternal laws that reign about his house, interpreting, without comprehending, the silence of doors and windows and the quivering voice of the light, submitting with bent head to the presence of his soul and his destiny—an old man, who conceives not that all the powers



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of this world, like so many heedful servants, are mingling and keeping vigil in his room, who suspects not that the very sun itself is supporting in space the little table against which he leans, or that every star in heaven and every fibre of the soul are directly concerned in the movement of an eyelid that closes, or a thought that springs to birth—I have grown to believe that he, motionless as he is, does yet live in reality a deeper, more human and more universal life than the lover who strangles his mistress, the captain who conquers in battle, or ‘the husband who avenges his honour.’—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

346. Is it not at the very moment when a man believes himself secure from bodily death that the strange and silent tragedy of the being and the immensities does indeed raise its curtain on the stage? Is it while I flee before a naked sword that my existence touches its most interesting point? Is life

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always at its sublimest in a kiss? Are there not other moments, when one hears purer voices that do not fade away as soon? Does the soul only flower on nights of storm? Hitherto, doubtless, this belief has prevailed. It is only the life of violence, the life of bygone days, that is perceived by nearly all our tragic writers; and truly may one say that anachronism dominates the stage, and that dramatic art dates back as many years as the art of sculpture. Far different is it with the other arts—with painting and music, for instance—for these have learned to select and reproduce those obscurer phases of daily life that are not the less deep-rooted and amazing. They know that all that life has lost, as regards mere superficial ornament, has been more than counterbalanced by the depth, the intimate meaning and the spiritual gravity it has acquired. The true artist no longer chooses Marius triumphing over the Cim-

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brians, or the assassination of the Duke of Guise, as fit subjects for his art; for he is well aware that the psychology of victory or murder is but elementary and exceptional, and that the solemn voice of men and things, the voice that issues forth so timidly and hesitatingly, cannot be heard amidst the idle uproar of acts of violence. And therefore will he place on his canvas a house lost in the heart of the country, an open door at the end of a passage, a face or hands at rest, and by these simple images will he add to our consciousness of life, which is a possession that it is no longer possible to lose.

But to the tragic author, as to the mediocre painter who still lingers over historical pictures, it is only the violence of the anecdote that appeals, and in his representation thereof does the entire interest of the work consist. And he imagines, forsooth, that we shall delight in witnessing the very same

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acts that brought joy to the hearts of the barbarians, with whom murder, outrage and treachery were matters of daily occurrence. Whereas it is far away from bloodshed, battle-cry and sword-thrust that the lives of most of us flow on, and men's tears are silent to-day, and invisible, and almost spiritual. . . .—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

347. It is not in the actions, but in the words, that are found the beauty and greatness of tragedies that are truly beautiful and great; and this not solely in the words that accompany and explain the action, for there must perforce be another dialogue besides the one which is superficially necessary. And indeed the only words that count in the play are those that at first seemed useless, for it is therein that the essence lies. Side by side with the necessary dialogue will you almost always find another dialogue that seems superfluous;

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but examine it carefully, and it will be borne home to you that this is the only one that the soul can listen to profoundly, for here alone is it the soul that is being addressed. You will see, too, that it is the quality and scope of this unnecessary dialogue that determine the quality and the immeasurable range of the work.—*The Treasure of the Humble*.

348. When I go to a theatre, I feel as though I were spending a few hours with my ancestors, who conceived life as something that was primitive, arid and brutal; but this conception of theirs scarcely even lingers in my memory, and surely it is not one that I can share. I am shown a deceived husband killing his wife, a woman poisoning her lover, a son avenging his father, a father slaughtering his children, children putting their father to death, murdered kings, ravished virgins, imprisoned citizens—in a word, all the sublimity of

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tradition, but alas, how superficial and material! Blood, surface-tears and death! What can I learn from creatures who have but one fixed idea, and who have no time to live, for that there is a rival, or a mistress, whom it behoves them to put to death?

I had hoped to be shown some act of life, traced back to its sources and to its mystery by connecting links, that my daily occupations afford me neither power nor occasion to study. I had gone thither hoping that the beauty, the grandeur and the earnestness of my humble day by day existence would, for one instant, be revealed to me, that I would be shown I know not what presence, power or God that is ever with me in my room. I was yearning for one of the strange moments of a higher life that flit unperceived through my dearest hours; whereas, almost invariably, all that I beheld was but a man who would tell me, at wearisome length, why he was jealous, why he

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poisoned, or why he killed.—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

349. 'What is it,' I asked, 'what is it that, in the "Master Builder," the poet has added to life, thereby making it appear so strange, so profound and so disquieting beneath its trivial surface?' The discovery is not easy, and the old master hides from us more than one secret. It would even seem as though what he has wished to say were but little by the side of what he has been compelled to say. He has freed certain powers of the soul that have never yet been free, and it may well be that these have held him in thrall. 'Look you, Hilda,' exclaims Solness, 'look you! There is sorcery in you too as there is in me. It is this sorcery that imposes action on the powers of the beyond. And we *have* to yield to it. Whether we want to or not, we *must*.'

There is sorcery in them, as in us all.

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Hilda and Solness are, I believe, the first characters in drama who feel, for an instant, that they are living in the atmosphere of the soul; and the discovery of this essential life that exists in them, beyond the life of every day, comes fraught with terror. Hilda and Solness are two souls to whom a flash has revealed their situation in the true life.—*The Treasure of the Humble*.

350. At the time of the great tragic writers of the new era, at the time of Shakespeare, Racine and their successors, the belief prevailed that all misfortunes came from the various passions of the heart. Catastrophes did not hover between two worlds; they came hence to go thither, and their point of departure was known. Man was always the master. Much less was this the case at the time of the Greeks, for then fatality reigned on the heights; but it was inaccessible, and none dared interrogate it. To-day it is fatality that we chal-



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lenge, and this is perhaps the distinguishing note of the new theatre. It is no longer the effects of disaster that arrest our attention; it is disaster itself, and we are eager to know its essence and its laws. It was the *nature* of disaster with which the earliest tragic writers were, all unconsciously, pre-occupied, and this it was that, though they knew it not, threw a solemn shadow round the hard and violent gestures of external death; and it is this, too, that has become the rallying-point of the most recent dramas, the centre of light, with strange flames gleaming, about which revolve the souls of women and of men. And a step has been taken towards the mystery so that life's terrors may be looked in the face.  
—*The Treasure of the Humble.*

351. Though Racine may indeed be the unerring poet of the woman's heart, who would dare to claim for him that he has ever taken one step towards her soul?

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What can you tell me of the soul of Andromache, of Britannicus? Racine's characters have no knowledge of themselves beyond the words by which they express themselves, and not one of these words can pierce the dykes that keep back the sea. His men and women are alone, fearfully alone, on the surface of a planet that no longer revolves in the heavens. If they were to be silent, they would cease to be. They have no *invisible principle*, and one might almost believe that some isolating substance had crept between their spirit and themselves, between the life which has its roots in every created thing and that which, for one fleeting moment, brushes against a passion, a grief or a hope. Truly there are centuries in which the soul lies dormant and slumbers undisturbed.—*The Treasure of the Humble*.

352. We are told that the famous tragedies show us the struggle of man against

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Fate. I believe, on the contrary, that scarcely a drama exists wherein fatality truly does reign. Search as I may, I cannot find one which exhibits the hero in conflict with destiny pure and simple. For indeed it is never destiny that he attacks; it is with wisdom he is always at war. Real fatality exists only in certain external disasters—as disease, accident, the sudden death of those we love; but *inner fatality* there is none. Wisdom has will-power sufficient to rectify all that does not deal death to the body; it will even at times invade the narrow domain of external fatality.—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

353. The Margaret of Goethe and Ophelia of Shakespeare had perforce to yield mutely to fate, for they were so feeble that each gesture they witnessed seemed fate's own gesture to them. But yet, had they only possessed some fragment of Antigone's strength—the Antigone of

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Sophocles—would they not then have transformed the desires of Hamlet and Faust as well as their own?—*Wisdom and Destiny*.

354. The heroes of famous tragedies do not question their souls profoundly; and it follows therefrom that the beauty the tragic poet presents is only a captive thing, is fettered with chains; for were his heroes to soar to the height the real hero would gain, their weapons would fall to the ground, and the drama itself become peace—the peace of enlightenment. It is only in the Passion of Christ, the Phædo, Prometheus, the murder of Orpheus, the sacrifice of Antigone—it is only in these that we find the drama of the sage, the solitary drama of wisdom. But elsewhere it is rarely indeed that tragic poets will allow a sage to appear on the scene, though it be for an instant. They are afraid of a lofty soul; for they know that events are no less

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afraid, and that a murder committed in the presence of the sage seems quite other than the murder committed in the presence of those whose soul still knows not itself.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

355. Can you conceive Jesus Christ—nay, any wise man you have happened to meet—in the midst of the unnatural gloom that overhung Elsinore? Is not every action of Hamlet induced by a fanatical impulse, which tells him that duty consists in revenge alone? and does it need superhuman effort to recognise that revenge never can be a duty? I say again that Hamlet thinks much, but that he is by no means wise.—*Wisdom and Destiny.*

356. It is in a small room, round a table, close to the fire-side, that the joys and sorrows of men are determined. We suffer, or bring suffering to others, we love and we die, there, in our corner, wherever we hap-

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pen to be; and it were by most singular chance that a window or door would for one instant fly open under the pressure of extraordinary despair or rejoicing.—‘*The Modern Drama*,’ *Essay published in the International Library of World Famous Literature*.

357. Modern drama has flung itself with delight into all the problems of contemporary morality, and it is fair to assert that at this moment it confines itself almost exclusively to the discussion of these different problems. This movement was initiated by the dramas of Alexandre Dumas fils, dramas which brought the most elementary of moral conflicts on to the stage; dramas, indeed, whose entire existence was based on problems such as the spectator, who must always be assumed to be an ideal moralist, would never put to himself in the course of his whole spiritual existence, so evident is their solution. Should the faith-

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less husband or wife be forgiven? Is it well to revenge infidelity by infidelity? Has the illegitimate child any rights? Is the marriage of inclination preferable to the marriage for money? Have parents the right to oppose a marriage which has love for its basis? Is divorce permissible when a child is born of the union? Is the sin of the adulterous wife greater than that of the adulterous husband? &c. &c. &c. And it may here be said that the entire French theatre of to-day, and a considerable portion of the foreign theatre, which is only its echo, exists solely on questions of this kind and the entirely superfluous answers provided to them.

But on the other hand, the loftiest point of human consciousness is reached by the dramas of Björnson, of Hauptmann, and, above all, by the dramas of Ibsen. Here we attain the limit of the resources of modern dramaturgy. For, in truth, the further

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we go into the consciousness of man, the less struggle do we find.—*Ibid.*

358. Accidental, adventitious beauty exists no longer; nor is there poetry now in externals. And what poetry is there—if we choose to probe into the heart of things—but borrows nearly all its charm, nearly all of its ecstasy, from external elements? And finally, there is no longer a god to widen the sphere of the action, or master it; nor is there an inexorable fate to form a mysterious, solemn, and tragical background for the slightest gesture of man, and enwrap it with a sombre, fecund atmosphere, capable of ennobling even his most contemptible weaknesses, his least excusable crimes.—*Ibid.*

359. It is legitimate and easy for the thinker, the moralist, historian, novelist, even for the lyric poet, to open up new ground in the consciousness of man; but at no price whatever may the dramatic poet



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be an inactive observer or philosopher. Do what we will, and whatever the marvels we may some day imagine, it is always *action* that will be the sovereign law, the essential demand of the theatre. It would seem as though the rise of the curtain brought about a sudden transformation in the lofty intellectual thought we bring with us; as though the thinker, psychologist, mystic, or moralist in us makes way for the mere instinctive spectator who wants to see something happen. This transformation or substitution is incontestable, however strange it may seem, and is due perhaps to the influence of the crowd, to an inherent faculty of the human soul, that appears to possess a special sense, primitive and scarcely susceptible of improvement, by virtue of which men think, and enjoy, and feel *en masse*. And there are no words so admirable, profound, and noble but they will soon weary us if they leave the situation unchanged, if they

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lead to no action, bring about no decisive conflict, or hasten no definite solution.—  
*The Modern Drama.*

360. In Siegfried's life it is not the moment when he forges the prodigious sword that is important, or when he kills the dragon and compels the gods from his path, or even the dazzling second when he encounters love on the flaming mountain; but indeed the brief instant wrested from eternal decrees, the little childish gesture when one of his hands, red with the blood of the mysterious victim, having chanced to draw near his lips, his eyes and ears are suddenly opened: he understands the hidden language of all that surrounds him, detects the treachery of the dwarf who represents the powers of evil, and learns in a flash to do that which had to be done.—  
*The Buried Temple.*

361. It is worthy of note that the spectator, however feeble, dishonest even he

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may be in real life, still enrolls himself always among the virtuous, just, and strong; and when he reflects on the misfortunes of the weak, or even witnesses them, he resolutely declines to imagine himself in the place of the victims.—*The Buried Temple*.

362. Fatality, briefly, explains and excuses all things, by relegating to a sufficient distance in the invisible or the unintelligible all that it would be hard to explain and more difficult still to excuse.

Therefore it is that so many have turned to the dismembered statue of the terrible goddess who reigned in the dramas of Euripides, Sophocles, and Aeschylus, and that the scattered fragments of her limbs have provided more than one poet with the marble required for the fashioning of a newer divinity, who should be more human, less arbitrary, and less inconceivable than she of old. The fatality of the pas-

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sions, for instance, has thus been evolved. But for a passion truly to be fatal in a soul aware of itself, for the mystery to reappear that shall make crime pardonable by investing it with loftiness and lifting it higher above the will of man,—for these we require the intervention of a God, or some other equally irresistible, infinite force. Wagner, therefore, in *Tristram and Iseult*, makes use of the philtre, as Shakespeare of the witches in *Macbeth*, Racine of the oracle of Calchas in *Iphigenia*, and of Venus' hatred in *Phèdre*. We have travelled in a circle, and find ourselves back once more at the very heart of the craving of former days. This expedient may be more or less legitimate in archaic or legendary drama, where there is room for all kinds of poetic fantasy; but in the drama which pretends to actual truth we demand another intervention, one that shall seem to us more genuinely irresistible, if crimes like Mac-

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beth's, such a deed of horror as that to which Agamemnon consented;—perhaps, too, the kind of love that burned in Phèdre—shall achieve their mysterious excuse, and acquire a grandeur and sombre nobility that intrinsically they do not possess. Take away from Macbeth the fatal predestination, the intervention of Hell, the heroic struggle with an occult justice that for ever is revealing itself through a thousand fissures of revolting nature, and Macbeth is merely a frantic contemptible murderer. Take away the oracle of Calchas, and Agamemnon becomes abominable. Take away the hatred of Venus, and what is Phèdre but a neurotic creature, whose 'moral quality' and power of resistance to evil are too pronouncedly feeble for our intellect to take any genuine interest in the calamity that befalls her?

Truly, these supernatural interventions to-day satisfy neither spectator nor reader.

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Though he know it not, perhaps, and strive as he may, it is no longer possible for him to regard them seriously in the depth of his consciousness. His conception of the universe is other. He no longer detects the working of a narrow, determined, obstinate, violent will in the multitude of forces that strive in him and about him. He knows that the criminal whom he may meet in actual life has been urged into crime by misfortune, education, atavism, or by movements of passion which he has himself experienced and subdued, while recognising that there might have been circumstances under which their repression would have been a matter of exceeding difficulty. He will not, it is true, always be able to discover the cause of these misfortunes, or of these movements of passion; and his endeavour to account for the injustice of education or heredity will probably be no less unsuccessful. But for all that he will no longer in-

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cline to attribute a particular crime to the wrath of a God, the direct intervention of Hell, or to a series of changeless decrees inscribed in the book of fate. Why ask of him, then, to accept in a poem an explanation which he refuses in life? Is the poet's duty not rather to furnish an explanation loftier, clearer, more widely and profoundly human than any his reader can find for himself? For, indeed, this wrath of the gods, intervention of Hell, and writing in letters of fire, are to him no more to-day than so many symbols that have long ceased to content him. It is time that the poet should realise that the symbol is legitimate only when it stands for accepted truth, or for truth which as yet we cannot or will not accept; but the symbol is out of place at a time when it is truth itself that we seek. And besides, to merit admission into a really living poem, the symbol should be at least as great and beautiful as the truth for

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which it stands, and should, moreover, precede this truth, and not follow a long way behind.—*The Buried Temple*.

363. It is not easy, I know, to free oneself wholly from traditional interpretation, for it often succeeds in reasserting its sway upon us at the very moment we strain every nerve to escape from our bondage. So has it happened with Ibsen, who, in his search for a new and almost scientific form of fatality, erected the veiled, majestic, tyrannical figure of heredity in the centre of the very best of his dramas. But it is not the scientific mystery of heredity which awakens within us those human fears that lie so much deeper than the mere animal fear; for heredity alone could no more achieve this result than could the scientific mystery of a dreaded disease, a stellar or marine phenomenon. No, the fear that differs so essentially from the one called forth by an imminent natural danger, is aroused within



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us by the obscure idea of justice which heredity assumes in the drama; by the daring pronouncement that the sins of the fathers are almost invariably visited on the children; by the suggestion that a sovereign Judge, a goddess of the species, is for ever watching our actions, inscribing them on her tablets of bronze, and balancing in her eternal hands rewards long deferred and never-ending punishment. In a word, even while we deny it, it is the face of God that reappears, and from beneath the flagstone one had believed to be sealed for ever comes once again the murmur of the very ancient flame of Hell.—*The Buried Temple*.

364. I was compelled, a few days ago, to glance over two or three little dramas of mine, wherein lies revealed the disquiet of a mind that has given itself wholly to mystery—a disquiet legitimate enough in itself, perhaps, but not so inevitable as to

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warrant its own complacency. The keynote of these little plays is dread of the unknown that surrounds us. I, or rather some obscure poetical feeling within me (for with the sincerest of poets a division must often be made between the instinctive feeling of their art and the thoughts of their real life), seemed to believe in a species of monstrous, invisible, fatal power that gave heed to our every action, and was hostile to our smile, to our life, to our peace and love. Its intentions could not be divined, but the spirit of the drama assumed them to be malevolent always. In its essence, perhaps, this power was just, but only in anger; and it exercised justice in a manner so crooked, so secret, so sluggish and remote, that its punishments—for it never rewarded—took the semblance of inexplicable, arbitrary acts of fate. We had there, in a word, more or less the idea of the God of the Christians, blent with that of ancient fatality, lurking

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in nature's impenetrable twilight, whence it eagerly watched, contested and saddened the projects, the feelings, the thoughts, and the happiness of man.

This unknown would most frequently appear in the shape of death. The presence of death—infinite, menacing, for ever treacherously active—filled every interstice of the poem. The problem of existence was answered only by the enigma of annihilation. And it was a callous, inexorable death; blind, and groping its mysterious way with only chance to guide it; laying its hands preferentially on the youngest and the least unhappy, since these held themselves less motionless than others, and that every too sudden movement in the night arrested its attention. And around it were only poor little trembling, elementary creatures, who shivered for an instant and wept, on the brink of a gulf; and their words and their tears had importance only

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from the fact that each word they spoke and each tear they shed fell into this gulf, and were at times so strangely resonant there as to lead one to think that the gulf must be vast if a tear or a word, as it fell, could send forth so confused and muffled a sound.—*The Buried Temple.*

365. Dramas which deal with unconscious creatures, whom their own feebleness oppresses and their own desires overcome, excite our interest and arouse our pity; but the veritable drama, the one which probes to the heart of things and grapples with important truths,—our own personal drama, in a word, which forever hangs over our life,—is the one wherein the strong, intelligent, and conscious commit errors, faults, and crimes which are almost inevitable; wherein the wise and upright struggle with all-powerful calamity, with forces destructive to wisdom and virtue.—*The Buried Temple.*



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